

I'll Never Set Foot in That House Again! Volume 2

Milli-gram

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I'll Never Set Foot in That House Again!

Prologue

My name is Chelsea. I'm the adopted daughter of Margrave Sargent, and a research fellow at the Royal Research Institute. Up until three months ago, I'd lived day-to-day being abused and called "useless" in a certain baron's family. However, ever since I awoke to the brand-new Skill [Seed Creation], everything has been going well, and I'm living really happily now.

A while ago, I made a coconut palm seed using my Skill. Today, since the first stage of my Skill examinations has finished, we'd decided to try drinking the juice from the coconut that grew from the tree, both as a celebration and as an inspection.

Lord Glen was already inside my personal lab. He was the King of Chronowize's younger brother, and a nationally-recognized Appraiser with Sage-level [Appraisal] and [Cure] Skills. He was a beautiful man, with dark blue hair like the night, and blue eyes that sucked you in. When I first met him, I couldn't help myself from staring, thinking a fairy tale angel had come for me.

While I was thinking about the past, there was a knock on the door.

"Sorry to keep you guys waiting," Lord Tris said as he walked inside. He was the son of Marquis Forium, and a researcher at the Institute who was helping research my [Seed Creation] Skill. He had brown hair and glasses, and a unique way of speaking.

Lord Tris was in a great mood and skipped over to the table, putting the coconut in the center.

"It's bigger than I thought it would be."

"Right? Everything that grows from Miss Chelsea's seeds is twice normal size!"

The coconut fruit was fresh and green, and larger than my head. In my plant book, it said that fresh coconut fruit has juice and some jiggly white stuff called copra inside.

"I'm excited to taste it," I said, holding my hands together. Lord Glen gave me a gentle smile, while Lord Tris grinned.

"Okay, I'll cut it! — [Water Magic]" After Lord Tris muttered the Skill name, a blade of water appeared and started slowly cutting through the top of the coconut. The moment it finished, the water blade disappeared.

"Oh, so you can use [Water Magic] too, Lord Tris?"

“Yep! I use [Earth Magic] to plant the seeds you make, and tend to them every day with [Water Magic]. They say I’m the best man for the job!” he answered, his smile growing even bigger at my shocked question.

He was right; having both the [Earth Magic] and [Water Magic] Skills would be really handy for studying my seeds.

“Now that it’s been cut, I’ll pour the juice into glasses... Wait, I forgot to bring some,” he sighed, face falling.

What should we do... Should we ring the bell to summon one of the maids? While I was all in a fluster, Lord Glen pulled three glasses out of nowhere.

“Use these.”

“Thanks!” Lord Tris thanked him before pouring the coconut juice evenly into the glasses. Despite the size, there wasn’t much juice in it. Altogether, there was only enough to fill one glass.

“Let me [Appraise] it before we drink it,” Lord Glen said, staring at the translucent juice. “This is amazing...” He sounded shocked, despite having appraised a lot of different things.

“What’s wrong?”

“It’s labeled as ‘Special Coconut Juice,’ and the effect says ‘After drinking, it will restore an extremely small amount of mana without any health drain.’”

“What?! Are you serious? That’s way too amazing!”

Just how good would it really be? I looked at Lord Tris, confused, and he jumped up to explain.

“We’ve got things called Mana Potions. They use a bit of your health to forcefully restore mana. You feel good right after drinking it from the mana gain, but about an hour later, the health bit starts kicking in and you’re exhausted! I can’t believe there could be anything that could do it without making you exhausted!”

“I-I see,” I said, nodding, taken aback by his enthusiasm.

“Even if it’s an extremely small amount, it’s still unbelievable. You could even say it’s a miracle...” Lord Glen piped in.

“Your other plants might have similar effects! Man, it’s so exciting how there’s still so much we don’t know, even after finishing our first stage!” Lord Tris was ecstatic and began happily hopping around the room a few times.

“Let’s get to drinking it.”

All three of us raised it to our lips at Lord Glen’s signal.

It tasted strange, nothing like anything I’d ever drank before... “It tastes kind of weird, kind of sweet.”

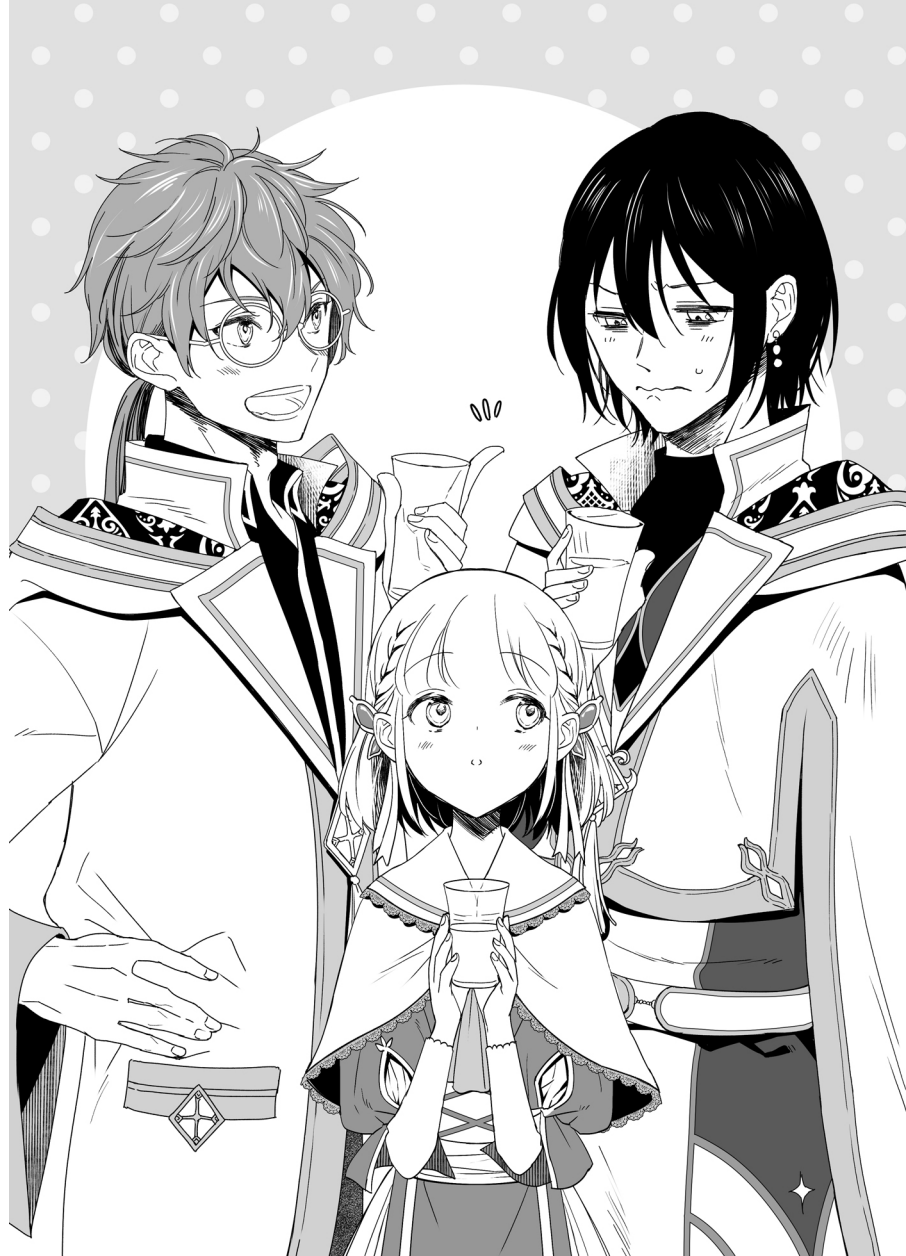
As we gulped it down, Lord Glen scowled. “I don’t really like the flavor... It’s not like I couldn’t drink it, but I wouldn’t do it on my own accord. I’d drink it over a normal mana potion, though, since it

doesn't cost any health to recover your mana." It seemed he was using [Appraise] on himself as he drank, checking to see if his mana was truly recovering.

Lord Tris, on the other hand, downed it with his eyes wide. "I think it's delicious! I wanna drink more!"

"Mass production... That'd be hard to do until we can examine it further."

"That means if we get farther in the examination process, we'll be able to drink a lot sometime, right?! We'll spread coconut juice as an alternative to mana potions, someday!" Lord Tris cried, smiling.



Once we were all finished drinking, I looked at what was left inside the coconut. “Oh, that’s right, my book said that the white stuff on the inside was edible, too.”

“Really?!” I could just see the sparkle in Lord Tris’s eyes...

“It’s what you make coconut milk from. With that, you might be able to make coconut milk flan... Wait, Chelsea, your eyes are sparkling just as much as Tris’s now,” Lord Glen said with a chuckle. Since flan is my favorite sweet, it must have been written all over my face... “I’ve appraised the insides, too, but they have no special effects. But, it does say it’s tasty, unlike the juice.”

“Seriously?! Lemme get it straight to the chefs, then!” Lord Tris scooped up the coconut and left the lab.

+ + +

“Since Tris is gone, let’s end our session for today,” Lord Glen said, before sitting across from me at the table for some reason. Usually, he’d walk me back to my room right about now...

“Is something wrong?”

“Kinda,” he said, sending the other servants away. Then, we were the only ones left. I sat up straight, waiting, and he gave me a strained smile. “I’ve got something to talk to both you and Ele about.”

The moment he was mentioned, the Spirit Tree outside of the lab sparkled, and Ele, the King of Spirits, appeared as a silver-furred kitten. He was really a beautiful man with long hair that reached the floor, but he’d taken kitten form since making a contract with me.

«It’s rare for you to want to speak with me,» he said haughtily, floating in the air.

I knew he was super important as the King of all the Spirits, but his kitten form was just too cute...! I held back my urge to pet him and looked back at Lord Glen.

“We’ve actually received a top-secret letter from the former Emperor of the Radzuel Empire.”

The Radzuel Empire was to the west of the Kingdom of Chronowize, touching the Sargent Margraviate on the border. I’d heard from Lord Glen that the miasma—something horrible that would wither plants, pollute water, and drive both humans and animals mad—was spreading through the country.

“Basically, they’re asking for a cutting of the Spirit Tree, but...”

Spirit Trees were a type of tree that birthed...or rather, *summoned* Spirits who could purify the miasma, and could only be planted from cuttings of the Origin Spirit Tree. The only one who could do that was the person contracted to Ele, the King of Spirits, which was me... This meant that I was the only person who could do it...

“They didn’t give us any more details in the letter, other than that their messenger would tell us later. If they want a Spirit Tree cutting, that means that the miasma really is running rampant through the empire. It’s spreading to the Sargent Margraviate, after all...”

As I nodded along with Lord Glen’s explanation, the floating kitten Ele spoke in a deeper voice than usual, «So they’re telling you to bring Lady Chelsea to a place overflowing with miasma?»

A gust blew through the lab, and Ele changed from a kitten to his true Spirit form in the blink of an eye. His otherworldly-beautiful face was contorted in anger.

“I will not allow you to take my Mistress!” he yelled, picking me up.

“Wha?!”

When I squeaked in surprise, Lord Glen heaved a big sigh from his spot across from me. “I don’t want to send her somewhere that dangerous, either! But if we leave it, the miasma will overflow from Radzuel into Chelsea’s new home, the Sargent Margraviate.”

“Oh, no...!” I gripped the brooch with the Sargent Margraviate’s crest on my chest. It was proof that I was a member of the family. I didn’t want to just abandon the people who gave me another home. If I was the only one who could stop it... “I’ll go to the Radzuel Empire, to protect my new family!” I shouted from Ele’s arms.

The Spirit sighed at me. “If you’ve decided, I will not stop you...but we must first see how the Tree is growing.”

“Why?”

When I asked, confused, he looked out the window at the Spirit Tree. “The cuttings are special branches that can only be acquired once the Tree is fully grown. Any other branches will not grow into Spirit Trees. Looking at it now, it seems that it will take another half a month to be able to take one.”

I was surprised, since I’d thought that any branch would work.

“Half a month, huh? We’ve gotta get carriages and other things ready, so that should be good. Then let me get serious...” Lord Glen sat up straight, looking at me in Ele’s arms. “I’d like to give Chelsea, the research fellow, and Lord Element, the King of Spirits, the duty of going to the Radzuel Empire and planting a cutting of the Spirit Tree.”

“I accept.”

“Agreed... But it’s embarrassing being called my first name...” Ele mumbled and scratched his cheek, still in spirit form.

And so, it was decided we’d be going to the Radzuel Empire. And of course, Lord Glen was coming with us, as the person who brought the issue to us. But instead of going straight there, we were going to head to the Sargent Margraviate first. Though I was a research fellow, I was still a minor, so we needed my guardian’s approval.

“Gotta do the groundwork, too...” Lord Glen mumbled with a bitter smile.

The Sargent Margraviate was where the mother who had given birth to me was born. My chest got warm at the thought that I’d be able to ask about her.

1. To the Sargent Margraviate

While we were waiting for the Spirit Tree to finish growing so we could get a cutting from it, I focused mainly on manners lessons. “Former” or not, I couldn’t make any mistakes when meeting with the former Emperor of Radzuel.

I’d gotten my curtsy to an acceptable level, and I practiced table manners every day at mealtimes, so I was fine there, but carrying on a conversation using proper noble lady language was difficult... My teacher gave me points for effort, but half a month wasn’t enough for them to give me a passing grade. In the end, we decided that I’d just have to try not to speak much...

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The day before we left, we had a send-off party in my lab. The fact that we were being sent to Radzuel to plant a cutting of the Spirit Tree was top-secret, so only a few people knew. Publicly, we were telling people that I was headed to the Sargent Margraviate to greet my new family. Lord Glen would be accompanying me to see about the miasma near the border, and to give my adoptive father proof that I’d become a research fellow.

“I didn’t expect that I wouldn’t be able to go with you...” My adoptive brother Marx, Deputy Commander of the Second Order of Knights, was sulking in the corner. My birth mother and my adoptive father were siblings, so Brother was also my cousin. It turned out that he was being sent on a mission that only he was suited for, and wouldn’t be able to take a vacation or accompany me.

“Though I would feel quite relieved if you could accompany me, Brother... There is nothing we could do...” I said, trying to stick to my ladylike speech, only to get a sad look back.

“Chelsea is becoming a lady...”

“Your sister’s gonna start hating you sooner or later if you don’t acknowledge her efforts.” For some reason, Lord Tris’s comment sounded really sure. He might have had a sister.

“Oh, no! I understand Chelsea is trying her best! It’s a bit lonely that she’s speaking so formally... But it’s a good thing!” Standing up, Brother gave me a grin. I pretended I didn’t notice it twitching.

“I wanted to go, too, but I couldn’t leave the field to anyone else.” Lord Tris sighed.

“Thank you very much. It’s thanks to you that we can go without worrying,” I said, trying to give him my best smile.

His cheeks went red, and he smiled. “...I’m really glad you’ve learned to smile, now.”

He said something, but I didn’t hear it through the knock at the door. In came my maid, Gina, pushing a cart. We already had tea and all sorts of sweets spread out on the table, but she seemed to be bringing something else.

“I’ve brought your favorite cake, Lady Chelsea.” Looking closer, I realized it was the trifle cake that I loved. The cake with custard and cream on top of fluffy sponge cake, with lots of different fruits, was always delicious, and I could remember smiling as I ate it.

“If you want more cake, you’ll need to come back home soon!” my other maid, Martha, said jokingly as she poured us our tea.

Though both Gina and Martha were my personal maids, they hadn’t been told about my mission. Because they only thought I was going to visit my family, they were staying here.

«Since everyone is here, you should begin.» Kitten Ele spoke up from his spot curled up on the sofa with a yawn. Normal people could only hear his voice as meowing, so Gina, who loved cats, jumped.

“You’re right. Since we’re all here, let’s hope for a safe trip for Chelsea...and get eating!”

At Lord Glen’s prompt, everyone took their seats and started eating the cake and sweets. After saying a prayer to the earth god, I started eating my slice of trifle cake. The fluffy sponge cake, two creams, and the sourness of the fruits all went together so well, and it was delicious! I couldn’t help but smile. After two, three bites, I realized everyone was staring at me.

“What’s wrong?” I asked, completely forgetting to talk like a lady...

“You look like you’re really enjoying it...” commented Lord Glen.

“I’m happy you can eat more, now,” said Brother with a smile.

“Strawberries are best left for last. You’re just like me!” Lord Tris grinned.

I went red. “It’s embarrassing to be watched as I eat...!” I said, puffing out my cheeks, only for them all to look at each other and laugh.

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The day we left, the weather was beautiful, with not a cloud in the sky.

“We’ll be awaiting your return.”

“We’ll be waiting, okay?!”

My chest felt warm as Gina and Martha saw me off at the carriage.

They're waiting for me... I was so happy I couldn't speak, so I just nodded at them. They must have realized what I was thinking, so they smiled back.

Then, Lord Tris appeared. He was holding a paper bag the size of both of my hands.

"I got these from the head chef," he said, showing me the contents. "Cookies, caramels, and candy. He made them just for you."

"Thank you very much. I'll take care to enjoy them," I thanked him, bowing a little.

"The cookies'll go bad soon, so you should eat them first." He gave me a smile.

"We should leave shortly." Lord Glen, who had been talking to the coachman, spoke up.

"Alright."

Taking his hand, I stepped inside the carriage. Ele was already inside in his kitten form.

"I'll see you all," I told the three seeing me off, and gave them each a smile.

"Please have a good trip." Gina and Martha both bowed as they spoke simultaneously.

And Lord Tris...

"I'll be looking forward to the souvenirs!" he said, waving his hand.

I waved back at them as the carriage started moving. We were leaving through the fortress's side gate, and heading through Count Mogridge's territory first. After that, we'd go through a few different territories before reaching the Sargent Margraviate in ten days.

In the four-seater carriage, there was a wooden box that would be a bit too long for me to hold on the front side, so I sat directly beside Lord Glen. Ele was curled up on top of it, sleeping.

"What is this box for...?" I asked.

Lord Glen nodded and replied, "It's the cutting branch."

Since the Spirit Tree, my Skill, and our mission were all top-secret, I'd been told ahead of time to be careful when I spoke while we were traveling. We didn't know exactly how much could be heard outside of the carriage, so he didn't mention the Spirit Tree at all.

"It's smaller than I thought it would be." Compared to the seed that I'd planted outside of the Research Institute, that one had grown to be just as tall at five stories. I thought that the branch for the cutting would be bigger than I was, but it seemed that I was wrong.

While I looked at the box, Ele woke up. «So we've finally left... I will have to stay with this box until we plant the cutting. I hope that it is sooner rather than later...»

"Why can't you leave the box?" I asked, confused, only to get a

yawn in return.

«I'm constantly using magic to keep the branch safe and from drying out, so I cannot leave it.»

"Keeping it fresh, huh... We didn't use any of that magic," Lord Glen grumbled, putting a hand to his chin.

«Ah, that's right. There is something I must give you.» Ele, still in his kitten form, used his front paws to open the lid of the box. I could see the branch inside, but...

"...It doesn't look much like a branch..." Rather than a branch, it looked like a rolling pin made of glass, sparkling.

«Spirit Trees are not normal trees. Everything about them is unique.» While I was nodding in understanding, Ele pushed both of his paws towards the branch.

"...Eh?!" His paws were inside the branch...

Lord Glen was shocked too, because his mouth was wide open, with a hand over it. As we blinked to make sure we were seeing things right, Ele pulled his paws out of the branch. In them was a sparkling, glass-like bracelet.

"What was...that?" Lord Glen asked, careful not to say much.

Ele pointed at the branch with his paw as he answered. «The Spirit Trees are connected to the Spirit World. I only took out something that I had put inside.»

On the old scroll, it had been written that the Spirit Tree birthed Spirits, but the truth was that they came from the Spirit World, which was on the other side of ours.

«I only put my hands inside, because I cannot leave the branch, but I can go back and forth from the Spirit World.»

"So you can still use branches that have been cut off to do that..."

"I thought you wouldn't be able to go back once you came..."

Ele shook his head at us as we muttered.

«I give this to you, Lady Chelsea,» the kitten said, handing me the bracelet. «It's made from a branch of the Spirit Tree. Wear it as a protective charm.»



“Thank you,” I said, slipping it onto my left wrist without thinking. But suddenly, it shrunk with a swish, fitting right around my wrist. I shook my arm in shock, but it wouldn’t come off. “Huh?! I can’t take it off... Is it cursed?”

Lord Glen looked closely at the bracelet from his spot beside me as I sat there at a loss. “I’ve appraised it, but it’s just a bracelet to keep the miasma away. No curse at all. It also has something called an ‘Everything Storage Function,’” he told me, whispering in my ear so that the coachman and the guard knights outside wouldn’t hear.

“What does it do?” I said, trying to be unspecific.

Ele answered as he pushed the box’s lid back into place. «The bracelet is connected to a personal storage room for you in the Spirit World. Anything you want to be stored will be sent to the room at your request.»

“So it’s the Spirit version of an Item Box...” Lord Glen mumbled.

«Similar, yes.»

“What is...an Item Box?” I asked quietly.

“An extra-dimensional spot where you can put things in or take them out. You can take whatever you want inside or out, no matter the size or weight. But time stops inside, so you can’t put anything living inside.”

“Is that how you sometimes pull things out of nowhere?”

Lord Glen stayed silent, giving me a cheeky smile and a nod.

«Try putting the bag of sweets in your hand inside.»

Following Ele’s directions, I looked at the bag and whispered, “Please take this.” The moment I did, the bag disappeared.

«There are Spirits assigned to your storage room in the Spirit World. They’ll always be waiting for you to call them, so please use it every now and again.»

There are Spirits assigned to me?! I looked at the bracelet in shock, and it glittered back at me.

«The Spirits taking care of your belongings are too low ranked to come to this world, so they’re looking forward to you leaving things with them.»

Spirits have ranks?! And if they’re looking forward to looking after my things, I’m gonna have to put things inside often.

“How do I get things out?” I asked.

«Think of the name and quantity of what you want to withdraw, and either whisper or think that you want it back. Then, it will fly out. But unlike an Item Box, please don’t put in things that will rot after a long time left alone. The Spirit World runs at the same time as this world.»

I nodded, then whispered again, “I’d like the sweet bag I just put

in back.”

The moment I did, the paper bag appeared...and almost dropped to the floor before Lord Glen caught it.

“Thank you.”

“Good thing your cookies didn’t break,” he said, smiling.

«I told you that it would fly out...» Ele shook his head at us, but no one would expect it to fly out of nowhere! «I’ll be resting more. Since I’m constantly using magic, I need more rest than normal.»

With that, he curled back up on the box and fell asleep. I saw the bag with my book out of the corner of my eye, so I thought that I’d like for them to take it. It still surprised me when it disappeared.

“The bracelet isn’t only pretty, but has an amazing function, too, huh.”

“Yeah. It’s handy, and a beautiful bracelet...” For some reason, Lord Glen looked like he had mixed feelings.

+ + +

Because we’d practiced staying at inns before, our trip went smoothly, without any incidents. Normally, when nobles went on trips, they’d get a warm welcome in the territories they passed through, and would buy lots of different things in the territories, villages and towns as thanks.

“They want richer nobles to do lots of shopping and help with the development of the region.”

However, we weren’t getting that kind of welcome on our trip. The reason being that I hadn’t had my debut into society yet. Sometime in between awakening your Skill at twelve, and becoming an adult at fifteen, you’d debut into high society. Until then, you wouldn’t publicly meet with other nobles. And since Lord Glen was headed to the Sargent Margraviate on a royal job, he was refusing all of the welcomes by saying he was in a hurry.

“I’m fine with doing some shopping in town, but I don’t like getting greeted like that,” he explained with a strained smile.

On the afternoon of our tenth day of travel from the capital, we reached the main town in the Margraviate’s territory. The town was filled with brown-bricked houses, and I couldn’t get enough of the difference in mood from the capital. Margrave Sargent’s manor was on the west side of the town. It was called a manor, but it was big like a castle, and about the same size as the Research Institute and the lodging house combined.

As I got caught up looking at it through the little carriage window, we stopped in front of the entrance. The door opened, and Lord Glen stepped out first. Then, he took my hand and helped me down.

Ele didn't move from his spot on the box with the Spirit Tree cutting, as he said he wouldn't. The guard knights said they'd carry him inside with the box, so we headed for the entrance hall. There, lots of people like maids and attendants were lined up to greet us.

"Welcome to the Sargent Margraviate. Though it's a small manor, please take the time to relax here."

In the middle of all the people was a tall man with pale golden hair and the same purple eyes as mine... My adoptive father and maternal uncle, Lord Jamesfort, the current Margrave Sargent. He bowed to Lord Glen.

"Thank you," Lord Glen replied, with a fake smile I didn't see often. Then, he glanced my way and shot me a gentle smile before whispering, "See you later."

Since he had to act like a royal from now on, we'd be moving separately. He said that we'd have to act by the book, because we weren't sure who was watching.

My adoptive father glanced at me too, and smiled. Then, as Lord Glen started walking, he joined him and walked inside the manor. As I watched them go off, Lady Ariel, my adoptive mother with her glossy black hair and black eyes, quickly walked over, standing directly in front of me.

"Welcome home, Chelsea."

"T-Thank you, Lady Sargent," I said, giving a very nervous curtsy.

She tilted her head, troubled.

"You're our family now, so you don't need to act so formal. And since we're family... Can you call me 'Mother'?"

"O-Okay...Mother."

She smiled softly and gave me a tight hug when I called her 'Mother,' and the servants watching all smiled too.

"You must be exhausted from the long carriage ride. I'd like to tell you that you can rest, but you should meet your grandmother and grandfather first!"

"Alright."

She led me inside the manor, and then even farther inside.

"Deeper into the manor is where we live as the Margrave's family. The front is where the people involved in the management of the margraviate work, and guest rooms."

The area when we first entered was decorated with vases and paintings, and looked really extravagant. But the farther in we got, they all disappeared, changing into cute furniture and colorful flowers. It looked like the inner section was decorated to the family's tastes.

When we got to the sunroom in the deepest part of the manor,

Grandfather and Grandmother looked at me in shock. Grandfather had the same pale gold hair and purple eyes as my adoptive father, and Grandmother had green eyes and the same light pink hair as me. *I really feel like I'm related...!*

Still looking shocked, they rushed up to me, touching my head, cheeks, and shoulders. I froze, since I hadn't expected that.

"Mother, Father, you've surprised poor Chelsea," Mother chided them.

They came to their senses and stopped touching me, but then just started staring at my face.

"I'm sorry, I just didn't think you'd look so much like Sophia... I'm Jakefort. You can call me Jake."

"Welcome, Chelsea. I'm your grandmother, Emma."

"It's nice to meet you, Grandfather Jake, Grandmother Emma," I greeted them with a curtsy, and they smiled.

It wasn't weird for me to introduce myself to family with a curtsy, was it...? Nervous, I looked over at Mother, but she was smiling too. *I'm glad I did the right thing!* They urged me to sit down on the sofa, so I did. *Huh? The fabric on this sofa is so silky!*

As I ran my hands over the sofa fabric, Grandmother whispered, "She's nothing like her on the inside."

"Her" was probably comparing me to my birth mother. Mother had told me that my behavior was similar. What did she mean by saying I wasn't like her on the inside?

"Um... What kind of person was my birth mother?" Mother had told me to ask them about her, so I did. They smiled gently back.

"Hmm... To put it simply, she was a tomboy," said Grandfather.

"'Tomboy' doesn't cover half of it. She'd chase after her brothers, climb trees, swing swords... She was nothing like a noble lady," sighed Grandmother.

"She was always wearing the same shirts and pants as her older brothers."

"There was no choice. If you put her in a dress, she'd come back with it ripped and covered in mud."

My jaw dropped in shock. *They're talking about when she was little... Right? It seems she was lively...*

"She went off with them exterminating monsters when she became an adult, didn't she?"

"I wanted her to act more ladylike, but she was very strong..."

Wait, wait... She was still like that as an adult? Rather than lively, that's... Um... I stopped understanding, just blinking more.

"I told her to go to some tea parties as an adult, but..."

Grandmother sighed again.

"Oh yes, she'd go to them dressed as a man," Mother chimed in.

With that, the image of my mother in my head shattered. It was my fault for building her up as some sort of holy mother when I didn't have any memories of her, but to think she was that...lively. I didn't know she was that much of a tomboy.

"Ah, um, Sophia had two Upper-level Skills. She was a very smart girl."

"Yes, she could do anything. She'd cook, clean and do laundry, just like the maids."

"She always said that she could marry into any family."

When they noticed my stunned look, Grandfather, Grandmother, and Mother all rushed to tell me her good points. But my mental image had already been destroyed.

"T-That's right! We've got portraits of her!" Grandmother rang a bell, and a maid came with the portraits. "This is her at three years old."

A little girl with the same light pink hair and purple eyes as me stood in a cute dress, smiling with her chest puffed out.

"This is from when she was eight."

The little girl was smiling happily in riding clothes.

"This is her at twelve, after awakening to her Skills."

The girl, taller than me, smiled in men's clothes.

"Here's her after she became an adult."

All of the portraits of her as an adult had her wearing gowns and grinning fearlessly.

"She's smiling in every portrait... She must have been really happy." I murmured. Hearing me, both Grandfather and Grandmother looked like they were about to cry.

"Will you tell us about how you've lived up until now, Chelsea?" Grandfather asked.

After drinking the rest of my tea, I slowly told them all that had happened. ...I probably shouldn't have gone into such detail. By the time I realized that, Grandfather had left the room in a rage.

"You've lived a hard life... I'm sorry we couldn't save you sooner. We'll do our best to protect you from now on," Grandmother said, moving to sit beside me before hugging me tight and stroking my hair.

"Thank you." I tried to give her my best smile, and hugged her tightly back.

After a while, Grandfather came back to the sunroom, looking slightly refreshed.

"This is your home. You can do whatever you want while you're here."

I gave a strained smile in response, and Grandfather pet me on the head too.

"Is there anything you want?" Grandfather asked.

“U-Um...” I had lots of clean, pretty clothes, and I ate yummy things every day. I couldn’t think of anything else I wanted.

“Would you like me to do upsies with you?”

“What are upsies?”

All three of the adults looked sad for some reason when I asked that.

“I would pick you up like this...” Grandfather mimed lifting something up high and putting it down a few times. I remembered seeing Margaret being played with like that when we were little. But that was for little kids.

“That’s a bit...” I knew that my height made me look younger than twelve, and I was a child compared to Grandfather, but I wasn’t *THAT* young, so I shook my head.

“Oh Jake, your bad habit is showing again,” Grandmother admonished him, moving between us. “You should rest for the rest of today.”

Grandfather looked really dissatisfied.

“Thank you.” After thanking Grandmother and bowing to Grandfather, I left the sunroom with Mother.

“I’ll show you to your room,” she said.

“Okay, thank you very much.”

“Oh, dear, you don’t have to be so formal with family.” She gave me another tight hug.

I wasn’t sure what to do. I’d studied how to talk like a proper lady, but I didn’t know how you were supposed to talk to family...

Mother showed me to a room on the second floor, and I saw nothing but flowers when we opened the door. The sofa, bed, curtains, carpets... Everything was flower-patterned. The well-used looking chest and the closet both had flower decorations. Even the drawer pulls were shaped like flowers.

“This was your mother’s room, and now it’s yours. We left the furniture the way it was and bought all new things, but if you want another pattern, just tell us and we’ll have it changed,” Mother explained, giving me a smile.

My birth mother’s room...but now it’s mine. I smiled naturally at the thought that I had another place to call home other than my room back in the lodging house at the Institute.

“Thank you for the wonderful room.”

“I’m glad you like it. There’s still time until dinner, so you should rest for now.” Saying that, Mother left the room.

Besides myself, there was also a maid here who started making tea for me. I sat down on the sofa and looked around. Everywhere I looked was covered in a floral design. I’d heard that my mother was a free and lively person, but she might have also liked cute things. *It*

feels kinda weird... It's not nostalgic, but sort of warm... I can't explain it.

Letting my guard down, I accidentally let a big yawn slip. The maid making my tea pretended she didn't see it.

"I might have a nap..." I muttered to myself. Laying back on the sofa, all of the fatigue from the long trip put me right to sleep.

Interlude 1: Glen and Margrave

James Sargent

Once we arrived at Margrave Sargent's manor, the current Margrave, James, led me to his drawing room. It felt like a comfortable room, with furnishings not too showy but also not plain. After giving each other our greetings, we sat across from each other on sofas.

"Can you clear the room?" I said quietly, and James nodded before having everyone present leave, closing the door behind them. "I'll get straight to the point. Here."

I put a letter containing orders from my older brother, the King, onto the table between us. Sealing the letter was special purple sealing wax that only the King of Chronowize could use, which looked both red and blue from different angles.

James picked the letter up, immediately opening it to read its contents. Inside, it said things like 'Glen is acting on orders from the King on a top-secret mission,' 'do everything you can to assist him,' and 'allow Chelsea to go to the Radzuel Empire.' Not seeing any information on Glen's mission, how he could help, and the reason why Chelsea was being sent to the Radzuel Empire weren't written, James tilted his head in confusion.

"We didn't want to put any of it in writing, so I'm here to tell you verbally," I said before going into detail as to why we were here and what the mission was about.

+ + +

"So you're heading to Radzuel, which is overflowing with miasma, with Chelsea..."

The existence of the Spirit Tree and Spirits, their link to the miasma, how Chelsea was the only one who could plant the cutting, Radzuel's request for a Spirit Tree cutting... I didn't gloss over a single detail in my explanation. James was frowning, probably worrying about Chelsea's safety.

"Before that, we were planning on doing something about the miasma flowing into the Sargent Margraviate."

James' frown only deepened. "Forgive me, Your Highness, but I thought that you had only brought one branch cutting. If you are

going to plant it in the Radzuel Empire, you will not have anything to plant here. How do you plan to deal with the miasma?"

"We're going to have Chelsea create a seed."

"A seed...?" He looked confused at my answer.

"You must already know, but I'll explain: Chelsea's Skill, [Seed Creation], allows her to create 'any seed she wishes for.'" I paused, sighing deeply. "Through our research so far, we've found that she really can create any seed she wishes for. A nonexistent seed for a Spirit Tree, a seed that would become a medicinal ingredient without any side effects... As long as we create a blueprint for her to follow, she can make *any* seed. That means it's possible for her to make one to deal with the miasma."

He swallowed loudly. Being able to make any seed imaginable meant that she could both save or destroy the world. He must have realized that it all depended on how Chelsea thought.

"Does she understand how dangerous her skill is...?" he muttered.

"I've already spoken to her about it. For now, since she hasn't created any harmful ones, we aren't planning on sealing her mana. I've promised to protect her as long as she doesn't make any 'bad seeds.'"

When I said that, James' frown became even more pronounced.

"What's wrong?" I asked, confused by his sudden change.

"Forgive my insolence, but allow me to ask something," he started, crossing his arms in front of him. "What will become of your promise when either of you become engaged?"

If either of us became engaged, huh... I looked away, hearing him point out something I'd been avoiding thinking about.

"It's still early for Chelsea to have a fiancé... But you have been an adult for three years, Your Highness. It wouldn't be strange at all for you to get engaged. And if you were, how do you expect to still prioritize Chelsea's safety?"

There probably wouldn't be a woman alive who would accept that. At the very least, none of the women who had sent me requests for marriage meetings so far would allow it.

"I can see from your face that you think it's impossible. If so, please, return Chelsea to the Sargent Margraviate. We'll do everything in our power to protect her," sighed James as I avoided his gaze.

2. Let's Study

When I woke up, I was in bed. *I thought I'd drifted off on the couch...?* Sitting up and looking around the room, all the lamps were off, and there was light shining in from the cracks in the curtains. *Oh no... Did I sleep all night without eating dinner?*

The moment I realized this, I heard a knock on the door. In walked my adoptive mother, followed by a few maids.

"Good morning, Chelsea! You wouldn't wake up no matter how much we shook you, so we got you changed and put into bed. You're looking better, so let's go have some breakfast."

I looked down at myself when she said that, and realized that my clothes had changed into a nightgown! "I'm sorry," I apologized, feeling bad, only for her to shake her head at me.

"Instead of apologizing, you should say 'Thank you.' And even before that, isn't there something you should say first? What do you say when you first wake up?"

"Ah! Good morning!"

"Good girl. Once you get dressed, have the maids bring you to the dining hall, okay?"

"Okay."

My new mother smiled at me before she walked out of the room. I didn't understand. I'd been scolded, but it didn't make me feel bad. In fact, it made my chest warm up. *This might be what they mean by familial love...*

After that, the maids she'd brought with her helped me get ready, putting me in a brand-new dress from the closet.

"You look wonderful, milady," one of the maids told me as I spun in front of the mirror.

+ + +

The dining hall in Margrave Sargent's manor was in the center of the building—split between a small one and a large one. When the family ate alone, they'd just use the small one, but when there were guests like Lord Glen, they ate in the larger one.

Walking inside, I saw that everyone else was already seated. I hadn't said good morning to anyone but Mother, so I thought that I probably should...

"Good morning," I said, only to get a response from everyone. *I'm*

glad I was right!

Seated from the farthest side were Lord Glen, my new father, my new mother, and a man and boy that I'd never seen before. Across from them were Grandfather, an empty seat, and Grandmother.

"Let me introduce you. This is Saix, our oldest son, and Felix, our youngest." Mother pointed at the two I didn't recognize.

"I'm Saixfort, the next Margrave. Call me Saix."

"I'm Felixfort, and I just became an adult this year. Call me Brother Felix!"

Brother Saix had light golden hair and purple eyes, while Brother Felix had shiny black hair and green eyes. It seemed that all of the men in the Sargent family had 'fort' at the end of their names.

"My name is Chelsea. I'm terribly sorry that I didn't meet with you yesterday. Brother Saix, Brother Felix, I hope you'll treat me well." I showed them my best curtsy, and they both broke into grins.

"Felix... Little sisters are great, huh..."

"Bro Sai, I'm so glad I was born..."

The two of them spoke quietly to each other, but I couldn't hear any of it.

For some reason, my seat was between Grandfather and Grandmother. *Shouldn't I be at the last seat at the foot of the table, order-wise?*

"I'm sorry, Chelsea. Jake insisted that he wanted to sit beside you..."

"I really wanted you to sit in my lap!"

"Do you want her to hate you like Sophia did?"

"No...!"

Grandfather and Grandmother started chatting, too.

"U-Um... I'd be okay with that..." I said, and Grandfather lit up.

"We can do it after breakfast."

"Chelsea is so much more tolerant than Sophia..." Grandmother muttered calmly.

I just said yes because I've never sat on anyone's lap before, and I wanted to try...

Breakfast was delicious, but I left a lot uneaten.

"Did you not like your food?" Grandfather asked.

"Oh, I did, I'm just already full... Before, I was never able to eat much, so my stomach is small," I replied. He teared up. "Oh, but I can eat a lot more than I could before!" That just made Grandmother tear up, too. "I'll do my best to eat more, so please... Don't cry."

I tried to comfort them, but they just patted my head and rubbed my back as they sniffled.

After breakfast, we headed to the sunroom so I could try sitting on Grandfather's lap.

"Come here, Chelsea," he beckoned.

I walked up to him as he sat on the sofa, and he picked me up and set me on his lap. It was hard and lumpy, but warm... It felt strange. When I looked down at his arms, holding me so I wouldn't fall, I noticed that they were thick and covered in scars.

"Grandfather, why are your arms so scarred?" I accidentally let it slip. I slapped my hands over my mouth, but I couldn't take it back. *I definitely made him feel bad...!* I glanced up at him in worry, thinking he was cross with me, but he just smiled.

"You see, the Sargent Margraviate is beside the Radzuel Empire and the demonic forest..."

The demonic forest was in the middle of the continent, and was so full of monsters that no humans could live there.

"We haven't been at war with Radzuel for a long time, but sometimes there are some scamps who come over to fight. And monsters are constantly coming from the forest."

I understood that the Margraviate was a dangerous spot in Chronowize. I'd heard from Lord Glen that on the north side, along their border with the demonic forest, was a tall wall, and they played offense and defense against the monsters. The soldiers I saw patrolling inside and outside of the manor were all muscular. The gardeners, gatekeepers, and stableboys were all brawny, too... I could even see muscles on thin women, here.

"Everyone in our territory got tired of living in fear and chose to fight—and it wasn't just the citizens who thought that, but the Margrave... Back then, I did, too."

"I was the same—as his wife."

"Grandmother, too?!" I asked, shocked.

"We got engaged when we were still children, so I was taught how to protect myself before we got married. And once we were, I couldn't just sit by while he came back covered in wounds, so I learned how to fight," my gentle Grandmother said with a fearless smile.

"So Grandfather's scars are proof that he's fought monsters and ruffians," I whispered as I looked at them, and he nodded to me.

"Then I should learn how to protect myself and fight, too!"

But when I said that, my grandparents groaned.

"If you're going to live in the Margraviate, it would be a good idea, but it would be difficult for you right now," said Grandfather.

"That's true." Grandmother nodded. "First, you need to aim for being able to eat a lot more. Then, you should learn how to move

when someone is protecting you.”

I knew that I was shorter and more scrawny than other people my age. I also knew that since I couldn't protect myself, I'd have to have others protect me, but I still felt a bit gloomy... I just nodded at Grandmother for now.

“You should learn how to run from enemies, and how to ask for help. Once you learn those, it'll make learning to defend yourself easier.”

“Since you've got Sargent blood in you, I know you'll want to fight someday. But that 'someday' isn't here yet. You don't have to rush.”

My grandparents' words made a big impression on my life from then on.

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After finishing my conversation with them, I headed to the guest room where Lord Glen was staying. I got a response when I knocked, so I went inside. Not only was Lord Glen there, but Ele in his kitten form, too. He was sitting on top of the box with the Spirit Tree cutting, of course.

«My mistress looks displeased. Is something the matter?»

Huh? Do I really look upset...? I touched my face.

“Let's just calm down and have some tea for now,” Lord Glen said, ringing a bell to summon a maid to make our tea.

We sat across from each other on sofas sandwiching a table. Since it'd been a while since I had sat across from him, I felt kind of nervous.

“Did something happen?”

“Not really, but...” I recounted the conversation I'd just had with my grandparents.

When I finished, Lord Glen gave me a look that was hard to explain. “That means you've definitely got Sargent blood running through your veins.”

«Though it doesn't seem as if you realize it.»

The two exchanged glances as they muttered. When I tilted my head, confused, Lord Glen explained.

“Your grandmother told you that since you've got Sargent blood in you, you'd want to fight too someday, didn't she? From what you told me, you're already thinking that you'd like to be the protector rather than the protected.”

«A difficult clan, but one suitable for my Mistress.»

I'd given up since I was short and scrawny, but...I hadn't realized I already wanted to do something about it!

“What do you want to do now that you've realized how you feel?”

Lord Glen asked with his usual gentle smile.

The answer was obvious.

“I want to become strong enough to protect myself and fight,” I answered immediately.

Lord Glen’s smile turned a bit daring. “Then I’ll show you one way to become stronger,” he said, clearing the room of servants.



“By being able to understand any situation, you can defend against things before they happen, and think of the best course of action. And what I can teach you is that understanding,” he said, pulling a world map out of his Item Box and spreading it on the table. “So, since we’re headed there in a few days, let’s study up on the Radzuel Empire.”

I nodded, and he lined up a few small cat and dog dolls.

“I’ve told you this before, but there are five countries in our world, all surrounding the demonic forest in the center. We live in the Kingdom of Chronowize, which is here on the southeast of the map. The Radzuel Empire is to the west, on the southwest side of the map.” He put the little animal dolls in a ring on the southwest. “Most of the citizens of the Empire are beastmen, able to take both human and animal form. They’ve got a strong sense of fellowship, and they have very long lifespans. They’ve got no social classes like commoners or nobles.”

He placed another little doll, this time of a dragon, in the middle of the ring.

“Unlike how things work here in Chronowize, they decide who rules by whoever wins in a duel. Up until three years ago, the Emperor was a dragonman, but he stepped down due to illness.” He knocked down the dragon doll, and replaced it with a bear. “The new Emperor is a bearman. Though he is good at knocking trees down and breaking boulders, he is lacking a bit on the brains side of things.”

Lord Glen paused, a bitter smile on his face, before continuing.

“The first year, they managed to keep things going from plans the former dragonman Emperor had left. But the year after that, there were famines, despite no big weather changes, and they couldn’t handle them. And so, the Radzuel Empire started going downhill.” He knocked the animal dolls over one by one.

Famines happened when crops couldn’t grow and people starved. The old gardener said he’d experienced one as a child, and that it was terrible. I knew the pain of starvation from back when I’d gone without food in the Eucharis barony. *I wish people could avoid living in hunger with the seeds I make...*

“And that was just last year. The famines continued into this year, and we haven’t been able to get any of their regional spices and herbs in Chronowize. Just a bit before they stopped completely, more miasma appeared, and even started leaking into the Sargent Margraviate,” Lord Glen said, sighing. “But the strange thing is, despite the famines and food shortages, we haven’t had a single

request for aid. We've tried being proactive and sending official letters saying that we'd like to help, but they've all been refused. Meaning Chronowize couldn't do anything..." His sigh deepened.

"Can the miasma be purified by anything other than the spirits?" I asked, having always wondered.

"If you use something like [Wind Magic] or a spell like *Gust of Wind*, you can blow it away, but it doesn't actually get rid of the miasma itself."

"I see."

"The Sargent Margraviate has hired mages with [Wind Magic] to herd the miasma into set points as a measure to keep it from the citizens, fields, and orchards. But since there's always more coming from Radzuel, they keep having to find new places to put it."

"Isn't there anything we can do?"

"There's something *you* can do, now that you understand the situation," he smirked, answering my whispered question.

«My mistress is the strongest, after all,» said Ele in his kitten form, puffing his chest out proudly on the wooden box.

I tilted my head, not understanding what they were getting at.

"Your Skill lets you make 'any seeds you wish for.' If you wish for them, you could make seeds that could purify or suck up the miasma."

My eyes widened at his explanation. *That's right! I might be able to do something with my Skill!* But just as I got excited, fear crept up, too.

"It wouldn't cause any trouble for anyone if I created seeds to do something about the miasma, would it?"

"...It would probably just be trouble for you, if anything," Lord Glen said after thinking for a moment.

"Just trouble for me...? If that's all it would take to help the Margraviate, I'll gladly do it!" I announced, clenching my fists.

He gave me a strained smile. "Just make sure you don't try too hard and faint, okay?"

"Alright!"

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A while after Lord Glen and I started discussing the new seeds, we heard a knock. Since we'd cleared the room, it wouldn't be a knight or maid...which meant it had to be someone from the Sargent family.

"It is I, Felixfort. Would Chelsea happen to be with you?"

"Yes, she is. You can come in," said Lord Glen.

"Thank you."

Brother Felix walked into the room. He looked troubled, like the gray sky before a sudden evening shower. He walked up beside me, but didn't say anything. *What's wrong?*

Lord Glen looked just as confused as I was. "Did you need Chelsea

for something?”

When he spoke, Brother Felix looked surprised. “Ah, no, it’s...”

His indecisiveness made me even more confused. *Really, what’s wrong?*

Lord Glen crossed his arms and started looking above Brother Felix’s head. He was probably using his [Appraisal] Skill. Back when he’d appraised me, he’d looked above my head the same way.

“I promise I won’t get angry, no matter what you say. Speak,” he urged. That probably meant there wasn’t anything strange there.

“Then, please forgive my insolence...” Brother Felix started, before looking offended. “I was horribly worried to learn that my minor sister was alone in a room for a long time with a man of marriageable age!”

A man of marriageable age... He means Lord Glen, right? And Ele is here too, even if he’s in kitten form, so we aren’t alone... Why would he worry about us being alone in a room? While I looked more confused, Ele muttered, «He wouldn’t understand if I said that nothing could happen while I’m here.»

He was right: Brother Felix would only be able to hear Ele’s words as meows, so that wouldn’t work.

Lord Glen looked troubled, frowning. “You could probably infer from looking over there, but I was giving her a lesson,” he said, pointing at the table. “There’s nothing odd going on here.”

Brother Felix turned and looked, and the expression on his face changed into one of surprise. On the table was the world map and animal dolls. “This is how homeschooling teaches worldly affairs...isn’t it?”

Homeschooling was the basic teachings that tutors or family members gave to children from childhood to when they enrolled at school at age thirteen. All noble children learned it.

By the way, though children went to either the Royal Academy or private schools, learned aristocratic manners and studied as a group, since I’d become a research fellow, I wouldn’t be going. Back at the Eucharis manor, I didn’t learn a single thing from tutors or my family. I only knew basic reading and writing and math because the gardener, the maid, and the chef taught me. If they hadn’t, I would’ve been illiterate...

“Back at the Barony she was born in, Chelsea had no opportunity to study. I’ve been teaching her when we have the chance, but... The reason I cleared the room was because I thought it best that no one outside her close acquaintances learned that she was uneducated.”

When he heard Lord Glen’s explanation, Brother Felix teared up, just like Grandfather had. “You had it rough, huh... But your big brother will be here for you from now on, okay...?”

“Thank you...?” I still didn’t get it, but he patted me on the head when I thanked him.

“It looks like the misunderstanding has been resolved. We’d just been taking a break, but... Felixfort, let me ask you for your opinion,” Lord Glen said with an impish smile. “Chelsea would like to give her family flowers. What kind would you suggest?”

...I’m giving my family flowers? Oh, but it might be a good idea to do, to show that I want to become closer! I stared up at Brother Felix’s face.

“F-Flowers?” Despite the sudden question, he crossed his arms and started thinking. “What about...lilies, maybe? Grandmother and Mother love them.”

“You can draw them, right?” Lord Glen continued confidently, only for Brother Felix to give a strong nod back.

“Of course!”

After Lord Glen cleared the world map and dolls off of the table, he rang a bell to summon a maid to bring paper and something to draw with.

Brother Felix looked proud as he stood in front of the paper. “I’ll draw it, then — [Picture],” he cast, drawing a large picture of a lily in just a second. It was beautiful and so realistic that I almost thought it was still blowing in the wind.

“It’s so real...” I whispered in shock, getting a happy smile back from my brother.

“My Skill [Picture] lets me draw anything I’ve seen exactly how I saw it. These lilies were decorating the halls a few days ago,” he explained emotively as I was entranced by the picture. “You knew what my Skill was, Your Highness?”

“I’m a nationally-approved Appraiser, after all,” Lord Glen replied, smiling like a little boy who’d just succeeded in pranking someone. “Your picture will be helpful, since it’s so lifelike. Thank you.”

“T-Thank you...” Brother Felix went a bit red, having been praised.

After that, he reluctantly left the room, having sword practice to attend.

“Let’s plan things with this lily as a base,” Lord Glen said after clearing the room once again.

“Alright.” It was easier to make seeds if I imagined something close to reality while I cast. Beside the picture that my brother had drawn, we drew a half-moon-shaped seed about the size of my thumbnail. Real lily seeds were smaller than my pinky nail. I made them bigger because they would be harder to lose that way.

«Spirits are the ones who purify the miasma, so you should make the flowers absorb it instead,» the kitten-formed King of Spirits suggested, puffing out his chest proudly from his perch on the wooden

box.

Lord Glen nodded, adding to the drawing. “How about we make it so that after it absorbs a set amount of miasma, it produces another seed before wilting to become fertilizer?”

«If it fertilizes the soil, it can revive the land that was made barren by the miasma.»

I nodded at their suggestions. “Should I make it so it blooms immediately after being planted?”

“That’s a good idea, since we want the problem fixed as soon as possible... We should be finished, now.”

I read the blueprint made from Brother Felix’s drawn lilies, my drawn seeds, and Lord Glen’s written plans for the lily seeds that would absorb miasma over and over again.

“Okay, I’ll try to make one,” I said, getting nods back from the other two. “Make a seed for a lily that will absorb the miasma — [Seed Creation].”

With a light click, a blue, half-moon-shaped seed plopped down on the table. Lord Glen looked closely at it, using his [Appraise] Skill.

“It’s called a ‘Blue Lily.’ It blooms into a bright blue flower, which absorbs miasma before withering to become fertilizer... You did it.”

I clapped my hands happily.

“With your mana pool, you should be able to make about twenty-five more seeds.”

“Then I’ll make as many as I possibly can!”

I want to get rid of all of the miasma flowing into the Sargent Margraviate, I thought, making seed after seed. After using my Skill so many times, we had a little mountain of them on top of the table. I was a bit tired and out of breath, but I wanted to keep going, for the sake of the Margraviate! Thinking that, I cast again: “Make a Blue Lily — [Seed Creation].”

The moment I did, my vision warped, and I fainted.

Interlude 2: Glen and the Blue Lilies

I barely managed to catch Chelsea after she swayed and lurched forward. It was really close, since we were sitting across from each other... Checking her status, I saw that she'd overused her Skill and fallen asleep, having used up all of her mana.

"She had to overdo it again..."

«Yes. Should she not have realized she was nearly out of mana from the loss of breath and fatigue?»

"She should have, since I cured all of her status ailments, but...Chelsea might just be so used to pain that she didn't realize."

«We must scold her for that, later,» the kitten said, looking worried from his spot on top of the box holding the Spirit Tree cutting.

"They're going to get the wrong idea about us again..." I muttered, laying her down on the sofa.

For now, I collected all of the seeds that she had made to absorb the miasma—the Blue Lily seeds—and put them in my Item Box. Then, I rang the bell to call a maid and have Chelsea carried to her room.

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A few hours later, James, the current Margrave Sargent, and I stood on a wide span of wasteland to the southwest of the manor. There, a dark, black, muddy gas—the miasma—was gathered. It writhed, almost like a living thing, but was kept in place on the wasteland by a barrier of [Wind Magic].

"It's really dense. Just getting close to it makes it hard to breathe," I said, despite the fact that the strong body my [Reincarnator] bonuses gave me made it hard to feel. All of the knights that had come as our guards looked to be in pain. "Let's plant the seeds that Chelsea made."

"These?" James asked, looking curiously at the blue half-moon-shaped seeds in the palm of my hands. The very oddly-colored seeds were the ones that Chelsea had created to absorb the miasma.

"Do your best not to faint from the shock," I advised everyone present, thinking back to when she had planted the Spirit Tree, or the plants in her personal garden. James gave me a (slightly twitching) smile in return.

I slipped a Blue Lily seed in a small fissure in the ground by my

feet. The moment I did, a sprout popped up, then some leaves... A second later, the flower was at my waist. A big blossom appeared, blooming into a large lily. The flower, just as bright blue as the seed it was grown from, swayed in the breeze.

Using my [Appraisal] Skill, I saw a pie graph sort of thing displayed, and the blue circle quickly turned black. That must mean that it was sucking up the miasma. As soon as the circle was fully black, the flower withered, produced a single seed, and disintegrated, becoming fertilizer. Then, the new seed that had fallen went to bloom again...and again, and again.

The knights who had come with us were all staring in shock, jaws to the floor. James was frozen, gaping at the sight before him.

“Just what I’d expect from Chelsea. They’re absorbing miasma and becoming fertilizer, just as we planned in the blueprint. But I didn’t expect them to grow and wither quite this fast,” I commented with a smirk. Chelsea was the one who made the seeds, but for some reason, I felt just as proud as she should be. “Now, let’s plant more around the perimeter of the miasma to get it all gone.”

I handed the half-moon-shaped blue seeds to James and the knights. Everyone looked on in awe at the seeds they planted.

We all stood there for a while, watching the Blue Lilies bloom and wither over and over again. It gradually became easier to breathe, and the knights looked more comfortable. Visually, the murky black mist started fading, disappearing gradually. Once all of the miasma in the wasteland was absorbed, the flowers stopped withering. That meant that there wasn’t any miasma left in the area.

“Looks like it’s done.”

Everyone there silently nodded at my words.

“It was like a storm when they were growing again and again, but now it’s like a calm sea...” James murmured, watching the blue lilies sway in the breeze.

“Are there other places you’re keeping the miasma contained in?”

“Yes.”

“What she made today probably won’t be enough. We’ll have to ask her to create more tomorrow.”

3. The Former Emperor's Envoy

I woke up in my own bed that evening. I'd promised I wouldn't overdo it, but I ended up using all of my mana anyway. Even though it wouldn't help anything, I couldn't help but sit there on my bed, holding my head. A few minutes later, I snapped myself out of it and got up.

I wanted to know about what happened afterwards, so I headed to Lord Glen's room. When I knocked, I was immediately let inside.

"Hey, Chelsea. Looks like your mana has regenerated," he said with his usual angelic smile, urging me to sit on the sofa.

«Really! There's only one of you, Mistress. Why do you always overexert yourself!» yelled kitten-form Ele from his spot on top of the wooden box nearby.

"I'm sorry..." I apologized.

«Treasure yourself more!» he said with a sigh, feeling bad. Ele stood on his hind feet, front paws on his hips angrily, but I nodded obediently because I knew he was just worried.

"So, what happened after I fainted?"

"After I had a maid carry you to your room, Lord James and I headed to one of the places they were trapping the miasma to plant the blue lily seeds," he told me, pausing to smile amusedly. "After they bloomed, sucked up the miasma, and then withered and left a seed over and over and over again, all of the miasma in the area was absorbed. Since they had other spots where they were gathering the miasma too, I left the rest of the seeds with him."

"That's great," I said, sighing in relief.

"When Lord James saw them bloom, he said it was like the ocean."

"I've never seen the ocean. I wish I could have seen..."

"Let's take a little detour to see them on our way to the Empire."

"Really?" I asked, getting a nod in return.

For the next few days, I made more blue lily seeds. This time, in order to keep my promise not to overexert myself, I only made twenty a day. I thought it was a bit of a waste to leave ten seeds worth of mana unused, but I was told I should always have some to spare in case anything happened.

After I finished making the seeds, I gave them to my adoptive father, who then had the margraviate's officials, soldiers, and mages

plant them in the spots where the miasma was gathered.

With that, the Sargent Margraviate's miasma problem *should* be over. Next is the Radzuel Empire.

+ + +

Someone who called herself the former Emperor of Radzuel's envoy had come to the manor's parlor. The lady, who was a bit taller than me, was smiling and looking my way. There were big fox-like ears poking out of her near-orange blonde hair, and a big fluffy tail sticking out from behind her, so I knew she had to be a beastman. I'd heard that they could take both human or animal form, but it seemed that they could make just one part of them animalistic, too. *She has the ends of her hair braided, kind of like Gina*, I thought.

"Nice to meet you! I'm Micah, a foxgirl~ I'm normally a chef~!" she said, spinning in place before giving us a smile.

Is that how people in Radzuel greet others? While I was surprised, everyone else introduced themselves.

"My name is Glenarnold Snowflake. I'm both the current Duke Snowflake and the King of Chronowize's younger brother."

"I am Jamesfort Sargent, the current Margrave Sargent. I'm here today as an observer. This is my daughter Chelsea."

I curtsied when my adopted father introduced me. I was surprised again that he didn't specify that I was adopted.

Lady Micah clapped happily when she saw me. "You seem just like the little noble girls I've heard of! Super cute~!"

My face burned beet red at suddenly being called cute by someone I'd just met. When I hid my face in my hands, she just smiled even wider.



“Let’s sit down and talk for now.”

Lord Glen and Lady Micah each sat on single-seat sofas, while I sat on a three-seated one with my adopted father. Beside the sofa where I sat was the wooden box with the Spirit Tree cutting, with Ele sitting on top.

Once the maids had brought tea in for us, my father cleared the room of servants.

“Lady Micah...”

“Just stop right there~!” she said, raising a hand to stop Lord Glen. “I’m an envoy, but I’m normally just a normal chef. Just call me Micah~”

It seemed that she didn’t like being called “Lady.”

“Then how about...Miss Micah?”

“Nnnnn... I guess I can live with that~”

Seemed like “Miss” was safe, though.

“Then let’s hear the details again,” said Lord Glen, only for the foxwoman to nod.

“I’ll start by telling you about Lord Royz~” she started, pulling a sheet of paper the size of both my hands together from her pocket. It was definitely bigger than her actual pocket... She might have been able to use Item Box, just like Lord Glen. “This is a portrait of him. He’s a dragonman, and was the Emperor of Radzuel up until three years ago~ He’s also my foster father, and he taught me how to cook, too!”

The former Emperor Lord Royz was a man with long hair and pointed ears. On the top of his head were two thick, straight horns. Since it was all drawn in black, I wasn’t sure what color his hair and eyes were.

“Three years ago, he fell ill and had to step down as Emperor~ A while after that, when he went to the castle to see how the new emperor was doing, he was exiled~ Now he lives in a house near the Demonic Forest and Chronowize’s border, spending his retired life defeating monsters every day~”

I had heard that he’d abdicated after falling ill from Lord Glen before, but I didn’t know anything about him being exiled or fighting monsters every day despite his illness, so it was surprising to hear.

“Next is some info about His Current Majesty, Emperor Bearsley. They held a huge battle tournament after Lord Royz stepped down, and Emperor Bearsley the bearman won~” This time, she showed us a portrait of a very rotund man with little round ears poking out from his short hair. “Emperor Bearsley is a dummy who only thinks of fighting. That’s why all the civil officials had to work hard to keep the country going~ And Emperor Bearsley...made friends with a fake

fortune-teller in a bar and believed him hook, line, and sinker~!"

"How do you know he was a fake?" Lord Glen asked.

Miss Micah pointed at Lord Royz's portrait in response to his question. "Lord Royz has the [Appraisal] Skill, so he knew at first glance~ Apparently, his Class was listed as Swindler~!"

"I see..."

It has to be true if it's what [Appraisal] said about him.

"The fake fortune teller told Emperor Bearsley, 'If you walk around with shards of Spirit Trees, the miasma can't get you. You should have all the trees cut down and distribute the shards to the citizens to protect them.' And then he DID!" She puffed her cheeks out angrily. "He really is a dummy, believing that when *eeeeeeveryone* knows that if the Spirit Trees are cut down, the Spirits can't come and purify the miasma anymore~!"

"What?!" I gasped out from surprise.

In Chronowize, not many people knew that Spirits purified the miasma. Back when I first made the Spirit Tree Seed, Lord Glen and Lord Tris only found out about it from reading the ancient scroll.

When I looked over to Lord Glen and my adopted father, both of them had their hands covering their mouths, eyes widened in shock.

"Why do you know that without the Spirit Trees, Spirits won't be able to come here and purify the miasma? In our kingdom, it was only written on an ancient scroll, and just a few people know..." Lord Glen asked her exactly what I had been thinking, and it was her turn to be shocked.

"Humans live such short lives, the oral tradition may have died out~ In Radzuel, it's a famous folktale that parents tell their little kids before they go to bed~"

Since I'd lived in a shed away from the Eucharis manor, going to sleep and getting up on my own since I could remember, I'd never had a bedtime story read to me before. *I wonder what it's like?*

"It may be told regionally, but I've never heard it myself. Would you be able to tell us more?"

Miss Micah put both hands to her cheeks at Lord Glen's request. "That's a bedtime story for kids! You want me to tell it to you here...? Too awkward~!" She hugged her fluffy tail, clearly embarrassed.

Both of the men looked at each other, wondering what to do.

"U-Um, I'm still a child..." I said, raising my hand slightly.

Her tail popped up straight. "That's right, little Chelsea is here~! Hm? Now that I think about it, why are you here too~?"

"Well..." *I wonder if it's okay to tell her I'm the only one who can plant the cutting?* I looked to Lord Glen and my adoptive father, and they shook their heads.

"We'll tell you why she's here once you finish telling us the story,"

Father told her.

She frowned. "You mean I have to tell you the bedtime story~?"

"Of course."

"If I have to~ You've gotta tell me why Chelsea is here afterwards, though~!" she declared, before slapping both her cheeks lightly three times and changing her tone of voice.

+ + +

Once upon a time, there was a girl and a Spirit Tree.

The girl was always fighting the miasma, all alone. The Spirit Tree pitied her as it watched, and summoned Spirits from another realm with the power to purify the miasma. Together, the girl and the Spirits put a stop to the dark miasma gas.

Years passed, and the girl became a woman.

One day, along came a man, asking for the girl-turned-woman's hand in marriage. But she told him, "I won't marry anyone, as I have the Spirits."

But the man wanted to marry her, no matter the cost. And so, he thought...

—If the Spirits were gone, I'd be her only one—

The man set fire to the Spirit Tree that brought the Spirits, turning it to ash. The Spirits disappeared, and the miasma was unleashed.

The Spirit Tree, thinking of the girl, had been repelling the dark gas.

Having lost the Spirits, the girl-turned-woman lost the energy to fight the miasma.

Unable to do anything, the man was engulfed in the miasma and became a monster.

+ + +

"...The End."

Since it was my first time ever hearing a story out loud, I really got into listening to it. Before I noticed, I was giving her quiet applause. Lord Glen and my adopted father looked somewhat conflicted, while Ele was facing down sadly for some reason.

"Since we all grew up hearing that story, no one would ever think of cutting the Spirit Trees down. But Emperor Bearsley parroted the fake fortune teller and ordered the trees chopped down. The word of the strong is absolute in the Empire~ The only way to stop Emperor Bearsley is to fight and beat him..." Miss Micah continued, with a big sigh. Her tail flopped listlessly, too. "...Lord Royz tried to beat him~ But his illness worsened, and he collapsed before the battle..."

You could tell from her tail and expression that she really cared for Lord Royz.

“And where would asking for a cutting come from?” Lord Glen asked.

She straightened her posture. “Every citizen of the Empire was given a Spirit Tree shard,” she told us, tugging out a leather string with a shard of a Spirit Tree attached. The shard, smaller than half of my pinky nail, glittered like glass. “As long as everyone carries one around, they’ll be safe from the fear of losing their minds to the miasma. But it doesn’t protect the livestock, fields, or vegetation. The land that was protected by the Spirit Trees’ presence has just gotten more and more corrupted.”

“I had heard rumors of famines despite a lack of destructive weather events, but to think it was a man-made calamity...”

Miss Micah’s shoulders drooped. “Lord Royz wanted to at least keep the impact to other countries to a minimum, so after he was exiled, he moved close to the border. Even though he’s ill, he’s been fighting monsters, using wind magic to keep the miasma from flowing out, and trying to find vegetation that’ll grow in blasted lands~ He’d been prepared to use the rest of his life to do what he could, but then we heard a rumor that the Spirit Tree had been reborn~!”

The Royal Research Academy was right next to the palace, and everyone in the capital knew that a Spirit Tree grew directly beside it. There was no way to hide a massive tree, just as tall as the five-story Research Institute, with a glass-like trunk and leaves. News of it spread throughout the continent via merchants and travelers, so it wasn’t odd that Lord Royz had heard as well.

“If we get a cutting of the Spirit Tree, the Spirits will appear and purify the miasma~ We’d have it gone before it got into Chronowize. Please ask Lord Royz for more details~”

“Then we’ll have to meet him and get a more detailed explanation,” Lord Glen declared.

Miss Micah nodded. “I’ve told you everything, so tell me why Chelsea is here~!”

I’d completely forgotten. I looked to Lord Glen and my adoptive father, getting nods this time. *It must be okay for me to say.*

“Um...I’m the only one who can plant the cutting.”

“Oh, so Chelsea has a contract with the King of Spirits, huh! That’s amazing~! Gotta keep that secret~!” She smiled happily, wagging her tail.

“How do you know that much?” I asked, tilting my head in confusion.

Somehow Miss Micah knew, despite the fact that the story she just told us didn’t say anything about only someone contracted to the King

of Spirits being able to plant cuttings of the Spirit Tree.

“Lord Royz is a dragonman, and they have the longest lifespans out of all of the beastmen. He can read and write ancient script, and knows a lot about ancient traditions. He learned that part while he was researching the miasma~” she explained with a smile.

I can understand that. Lord Tris would be so jealous if he heard someone could read and write in ancient script.

4. Heading for the Radzuel Empire

The next day, we headed towards Lord Royz's home near the border between the Radzuel Empire and Chronowize. We'd brought a lot of guardian knights with us from the capital, but the fact that we were going to the empire was top-secret, so we only brought four carefully selected knights with us this time.

"We've got no idea what Emperor Bearsley'll do if he finds out, so we have to be sneaky~" Miss Micah said, pointing to a covered wagon. As I looked confused, she laughed. "Micah comes here in a covered wagon for shopping. If you hide between the foodstuffs, they won't find you~"

"So you're smuggling us in?"

"I've already talked with the soldiers at the border crossing, so it'll be fine~"

Apparently, the problem was if someone unrelated saw us and spread rumors.

Lord Glen, Ele, and I boarded the wagon first with the cutting box. Then, with baskets of fruits and vegetables piled around us, it just looked like she was coming back from a shopping trip. The guardian knights were walking around it, dressed up as mercenaries.

Once Miss Micah sat on the driver's bench, the wagon started moving. Since there wasn't a wall between the driver's bench and the back, we could hear her humming.

"Y'know, I've been thinking. That kitty of yours is really quiet~"

Kitten-form Ele hadn't made a peep since we'd met Miss Micah. Maybe he was tired from constantly using his magic on the Spirit Tree cutting? I looked at him, but all he did was yawn and silently curl up again.

"Oh, that's right. Would we have the time to make a little detour?" Lord Glen asked.

"We should be fine as long as we get back before sunset~"

After their short conversation, the wagon stopped a bit off of the highway.

"No one's here, so it should be safe for you to get out~"

Once we got the okay, Lord Glen and I got off of the wagon and saw a bright blue flower...a blue lily blooming there.

"You kept your promise," I whispered, getting a gentle, angelic smile back from him.

The wastelands where the blue lilies bloomed were covered in fertilizer, which was left once the flower had bloomed and wilted. It was proof that there had been a large amount of miasma here just a while before.

"I've never seen a lily that color before~ If there were more, it'd look like the ocean~" Miss Micah said from her spot on the driver's bench.

I want to see the real ocean someday...

At the border crossing, you had to show the soldiers proof of your identity and a pass. A soldier with a fluffy tail at the checkpoint smirked when he saw Miss Micah.

"Got a lot with you today, huh?"

"It's been dangerous, lately, y'know~?"

"Famine's gettin' worse, yeah. Better to have guards with you when you're carryin' food," he said, giving another smirk before letting us pass straight through. He didn't check the contents of the wagon or ask for identification from any of the guardian knights dressed as mercenaries.

After getting a bit farther away, Miss Micah whispered, "That soldier got a letter from Lord Royz explaining things~" *So that's why he smirked.* "He was so happy to get one from him. Everyone loves Lord Royz~"

As I nodded in understanding, the wagon took a turn. I'd heard that we'd be leaving the highway beforehand, so I wasn't surprised. A little while later, we could see a building surrounded by a wooden fence. It was a log house about the size of my room back at the Research Institute.

"This is Lord Royz's home~" she announced, stopping the wagon beside the house and walking inside. Lord Glen, the knights carrying Ele and the cutting box, and I followed her inside.

"I'm baaaa~ack! Lord Royz, are you still kickin'~?"

"Hah? I'm still here," a tall man replied to her, walking over from farther inside. His long, near-black green hair was braided with a length of cloth, and swayed as he walked. His eyes were deep green, and seemed to suck you in. His ears were in the same place as human ones, but they were long and pointed, and on the top of his head were big, thick black horns growing out. His scales and the tail with fur the same color as his hair made him really look like a dragonman.

I wonder if the reason he looks older than his portrait is because he's sick?

He gave me a weird look when he saw I was staring. "You've brought some weird guests today, Micah."

"You're the one who told me to bring them~! Have you forgotten already~?"

“Wait, are these people from Chronowize? I never expected you’d actually bring any. Great job.”

“What’s with the monotone! Praise me properly~!” Miss Micah looked angry, but her wagging tail said otherwise.

“Okay, okay, good girl,” Lord Royz said in a deeper monotone, roughly messing her hair up.

Her tail is wagging even harder...



“Well then, let’s get talking. You guys can sit on that sofa over there.”

Lord Glen and I sat on the sofa he pointed to. We had the cutting box and Ele set by our feet. The kitten-formed Spirit was still curled up, sleeping. Lord Royz sat down on the three-seater sofa on the other side of the low table in front of us.

Miss Micah quickly set out tea and sweets on the low table. Once she finished, she stood behind the sofa Lord Royz sat at.

“Should introduce myself first, huh,” he said, looking listless. “I’m Royz, former Emperor of Radzuel. I’m currently enjoying my retirement living in the country. Just enough monsters out here for a good bit of exercise.”

“...I’m the younger brother of the King of Chronowize, Glenarnold Snowflake. I’ve come here in charge of the Spirit Tree issue.”

“It’s nice to meet you. My name is Chelsea Sargent. I am a research fellow at the Royal Research Institute.” I introduced myself using the ladylike words they’d drilled into me before we left, but I was worried I’d said it weird. If I spoke too much, I’d go back to my normal way of speaking, so I had to keep quiet as much as possible...

Lord Royz glanced at my face before moving his eyes above my head. After he looked at me, he looked above Lord Glen’s head too, and his expression changed to one of shock. I glanced over at Lord Glen, and he looked shocked too.

What’s wrong? Oh, that’s right. Miss Micah said that Lord Royz also had the [Appraisal] Skill. They might have seen something surprising on each other’s results.

Watching them for a bit, Lord Royz mumbled something.

“Damn, it’s a shock to meet another [Reincarnator] now.”

I couldn’t make out what he said, but Lord Glen must have, because he kept nodding.

“I knew that there had to be others, but I never thought the former Emperor would be one.”

“It’s been about 100 years since I last saw one... Can I just call you Glen?”

“That’s fine. I’ll just call you Royz.”

Just from the way their conversation was going, it seemed that both of them might have been surprised that they have the same rare Skill.

“Ah, that’s right. Micah can make Japanese food, so stay the night here.”

“Japanese food... I’ve been dreaming of eating that for so long...!” Lord Glen’s eyes were sparkling for once. When he saw that, Lord Royz smiled happily too.

I really didn't know exactly what happened, but it seemed they were getting along well despite only just meeting.

After the situation had mellowed, Lord Royz sat himself down properly. "Let's get to the point," he started, before having a coughing fit. Miss Micah softly patted his back. "First, I wanna thank you for coming all this way. I should've been the one to go to Chronowize myself, but... Honestly, I don't have it in me to travel now."

I knew that he'd retired because of his sickness, but I hadn't thought it was bad enough he couldn't travel. I stared at him, worried, only to get a smirk back. *He must not want me to worry...*

"Micah probably gave you the basics, but I want you to listen to my Spirit Tree Plan," he said, pulling a map from somewhere—probably another Item Box—to show us. The map had a number of marks along the borderline between Radzuel and Chronowize. "If we put Spirit Trees at regular intervals juuuust on the border, the miasma shouldn't flow into Chronowize."

"Wait just one second. There was no specification you wanted more than one. That's all we have here," Lord Glen interrupted, looking at the wooden box at our feet.

Ele was still on top of it. After stretching, he sat down and spoke, «It's not so simple to prepare more than one cutting. Were we to make as many as your plan requires, it would take years.»

"Huh? That isn't a normal kitten?"

It seemed that Lord Royz had understood what kitten-form Ele said, despite the fact that normal people shouldn't be able to. He stared above the Spirit's head. *Maybe they both understand because they have the [Appraisal] Skill...?*

"I'd thought it was a catperson in animal form, but it's the King of the Spirits' temporary form, huh... Nice."

It seemed he'd used his [Appraisal] skill to see Ele's true status.

"Now that I think about it, Chelsea had 'The Spirit King's Contractor' as her occupation." The moment Lord Royz said that, he froze. A moment later, he turned to me, moving like a rusted doll. "I didn't think a kid this little'd be the contractor. Sorry for making you travel so far."

As he said that, he fell into an even worse coughing fit than before. Miss Micah was rubbing his back again, but it wasn't stopping. *That looks like it really hurts. I wish I could do something...*

"That's weird... I thought I was doing good today..."

"It's because you've been spamming your [Appraisal] Skill! You should've been holding back~!" Miss Micah was scolding him, but her worry was making her tail droop.

"What kind of illness...are you afflicted with?" I asked, trying to sound ladylike, but he just looked away from me, not answering. Did

he not want to tell me?

Lord Glen spoke up while I was confused. "It's called Mana Deficiency Disease. It's a sickness where your mana pool can't fill up."

"Hey, Glen. Don't tell a little kid something that'll worry her."

"...I will be an adult in three years, so I am not that little," I said slowly, still using ladylike language.

"That's true. If you're a research fellow, I shouldn't be treating you like a kid. Sorry," Lord Royz apologized, before explaining his illness to me.

Mana Deficiency Disease was a disease where it was almost as if your mana pool had a hole in it, stopping it from filling. Normally, your mana would regenerate by sleeping or eating, but with the disease, your mana would slowly drain without you doing anything, eventually leading to death.

"A normal person would die after half a year, maybe a whole year... I've been eating Micah's medicinal cooking, so I've managed to survive these three years. But the end is nigh," he said, looking as if he'd given up.

Hearing him say that made Miss Micah, who had been standing behind the sofa, pull her lips tight as if she was trying not to cry.

+ + +

We decided to take a little break, so Lord Glen and I stepped outside. I'd noticed it a bit back when we were in the wagon, but most of the trees in the surrounding area were dead. We couldn't see a single flowering plant, and the ground itself was cracking.

Circling around the house, we saw fields about three times as big as the house itself with different seedlings sprouting. *Oh, that's right. Miss Micah said that Lord Royz was looking for crops that could be grown in blasted lands. Those must be what she was talking about. But they're all withered. There really is a famine...*

While I was realizing that, Lord Glen spoke, "I can tell from this field that Royz decided that Spirit Trees were the only option after all he'd thought up and tried."

"He abdicated the throne, but he's still thinking about his citizens and working to help them... As a ruler who cares about his subjects, he should live as long as possible," I said. Remembering what he'd said before, I asked, "You can't use your [Cure] Skill to heal him?"

He nodded. "Sometimes you can cure some illnesses with operations, but Mana Deficiency Disease affects your mana pool, which is invisible to humans, so it can't be operated on. The only thing that might work is medication."

My Skill, [Seed Creation], lets me make any seed I wish for. Any seed... Even one that could cure Lord Royz's disease.

“I want to make a seed that can save Lord Royz,” I said, words leaving my mouth before I even realized.

Lord Glen looked shocked for a moment, but his face soon changed to his usual gentle smile. “I was just about to ask you, but you beat me to the punch.”

“If he gets healthy again, he’d be able to protect the Spirit Tree after I plant the cutting. It would be horrible if it was cut down right after it was planted...”

He patted me on the head softly after I said that. “Okay, let’s get him healthy before we plant the cutting.”

“Okay!” I nodded.

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Going back inside the house, Lord Royz was reclining on the three-seater couch, smirking. “You’re back. I’m feeling a bit better, so let’s continue our discussion.”

I could tell he was bluffing, since he didn’t look much different from before our break. *He might be forcing himself so things get done...* The moment I thought that, I felt a pang in my heart.

Miss Micah put out some newly brewed tea on the low table. Lord Glen leaned forward with a concerned look on his face.

“Before we do that, can we talk for a bit?”

Lord Royz looked confused, but nodded. He sat up properly on the sofa.

Lord Glen took a deep breath before starting, “Since you’ve got the same [Appraisal] Skill as I do, you must already know what Chelsea’s Skill is... Right?”

“She can make any seed she wishes for. Never seen anyone have [Seed Creation] in my life. So...?” the dragonman replied, readily describing my Skill.

“I want to make a seed that would heal your sickness,” I said, not bothering with a ladylike tone.

He tilted his head curiously. Standing behind him and the sofa, Miss Micah’s tail fluffed up.

“We’ve just met. Would you heal *anyone*’s illness after first meeting them?”

“I wouldn’t do it for just anyone,” I said, shaking my head. “Even if you aren’t the active ruler anymore, you still care about your subjects. It’d be good if you can live as long as you can.”

“...It’s true that I’ve been thinking of the citizens even after retiring. It’s hard to drop the habit after ruling for around a century. Honestly, it’s hard seeing the country I built up fall to bits like this... If I could cure this disease of mine and become Emperor again, I would,” he muttered before going silent.

Miss Micah was shaking. “Can you really...really cure Lord Royz’s disease?”

“I can do it with my Skill,” I said resolutely.

Her fluffed up tail started wagging back and forth. “If you can get it cured, you should do whatever possible to do it~! You’re *THAT* important to the Empire! What are you hesitating for?!” she said, smacking him in the head repeatedly with the tray she’d been holding.

“M-Micah, calm down!”

“You think I can calm down?! Have her cure you and then punch both that dummy of an Emperor and the fake fortune teller! Beat them to a pulp!”

The current Emperor had believed the fake fortune teller and chopped down all of the Spirit Trees, making it impossible for the Spirits to come and purify the miasma and causing a famine... Of course she would hold a grudge.

“I understand how you feel. More than half of the country probably wishes I’d get healed up and beat ’em up,” Lord Royz said, stopping Miss Micah’s assault. “No one thought it’d be possible to heal me. I’d given up, too. Imagine the looks on their faces when I’m back to business...” he continued, his grin changing to a fearless demon lord’s smile. “Cure me!”

I gave him a strong nod back.

+ + +

“When I make new seeds, I need to have a detailed blueprint, or else I can’t imagine it,” I said, completely forgetting I was supposed to be talking like a lady.

“The tone you’re using now suits you. Don’t use the stuffy ladylike one you were using before with me,” Lord Royz ordered with a smirk.

“O-Okay...” I was surprised. I’d expected to be told I was rude, not to stop talking politely.

“So about that blueprint... Why don’t we make medicine like an *Elixir*?”

“Chelsea creates seeds, so you mean a seed with *Elixir* inside, right?”

I have no idea what these two are talking about... Confused, I asked, “What’s an *Elixir*?”

They both puzzled over their answers.

“I’d describe it as a liquid that can heal poison, paralysis, curses, any negative status imaginable...”

“The ones I know of restore your health and mana to max, too.”

Curing poison, paralysis, curses, and any other bad status effects, and restoring your health and mana? It’s like everything amazing in the world rolled into one. “Since it’s liquid... Why don’t we make it like a coconut

and have the juice inside?"

"Oh yeah, that's a great idea. But it'd be hard to carry if it was that big, so maybe just big enough to fit in the palm of your hand?" Lord Royz suggested, popping his fist down on the palm of his other hand.

"If you made the stem into a cork, it'd be easy to drink from," Miss Micah said, pointing to a wine bottle before popping the stem off of an orange.

«Make it so that it will wither instead of growing if planted.»

"Why wouldn't you want it to grow?" I asked Ele, still in his kitten form.

«If it ever fell into the hands of villains, it wouldn't be misused as long as it touched the ground.»

I nodded in understanding. Since it would have such an amazing effect, it would be important to take countermeasures like that.

"Instead of tasting like coconut juice, let's make it so it tastes sweet and refreshing, so everyone thinks it's good."

Lord Glen had mentioned before that he didn't like the taste of coconut juice. Since I was making it to drink, flavor would be a big part of it.

After that we discussed the size of the leaves, height of the stem, how big the flowers would be... All kinds of things. Once we'd decided, we went to draw it, but... We had a problem. Lord Glen, Lord Royz, and I were terrible at drawing. We tried, but it came out looking like a lanky, weird plant. *I wish Lord Tris was here...!*

"I'll draw it for you~" Miss Micah said, sketching it out quickly. She had a strange style, but she was by far the best out of all of us! It was nice how Lord Glen and Lord Royz were looking at her reverently.

Beside the drawing, we wrote down the effects of the *Elixir* that would be inside the seed.

"...And it's done," I said, getting nods from everyone else. I read the new seed's blueprint over and over again to memorize it, but we had another problem. "I can imagine mana restoration being like your mana pool is being filled, but health isn't stored anywhere... How would I..."

No matter what I did, I couldn't imagine health being restored. Even if I wished for it to come out just as the blueprint said, there was a chance it wouldn't happen without my imagining it.

The men looked at each other.

"For us with our [Appraisal] Skill, it's easy to imagine since we see it in numerical form, but..."

"Hmm... How should we explain that?"

In the end, we decided to just erase the part about it restoring your health.

After reading things over again, I decided I'd memorized enough, nodding to myself. "I'll make a seed just as the blueprint says — [Seed Creation]."

After I cast it, a round orange seed with a cork plopped down into my palms. Both Lord Glen and Lord Royz stared at it using their [Appraisal] Skills.



“Wow... It really is an *Elixir*,” Lord Royz mumbled.

“It’s called an ‘Elixir Seed,’ and its effect is healing all status effects and restoring mana to max...”

I handed it to the former Emperor. After swallowing hard, he took it, and...quickly popped the cork out and drained its contents. We watched with bated breath, before he screamed.

“Uooooooooooooah...! I’m bursting with manaaaaaaaaa!”

I jumped, shocked by his sudden yelling.

He gave me an incredibly enchanting smile. “Chelsea, my savior! No, Lady Chelsea! I swear allegiance to you!”

“Huh?!”

He took my hand, resting his forehead against the back of it. “I offer myself to you, forev—”

Before he could finish that sentence, Miss Micah drop-kicked him. He flew across the room, hitting the floor.

“You’re absolutely the *worst*, starting matrimonial vows without even asking the other person!” she screeched, puffing up her tail in rage.

Hearing that, even Lord Glen looked enraged, glaring at him.

Matrimonial...? That’s marriage, right? I thought. “Wait, are you and Miss Micah not married?”

“Absolutely impossible~! Lord Royz is my foster father and teacher. There’s no romantic feelings there!”

“I dunno about humans, but us beastmen don’t romantically love our children or siblings. I might’ve picked her up, but I raised Micah like my own. I’d never think of her like that,” Lord Royz added. “But, Chelsea, I don’t think of you as my child or daughter. Therefore, my desire to have you for myself...”

Miss Micah threw the tray she was holding at him. “You’re so selfish! You’re trash!”

He was still on the ground, but the dragonman caught the tray in midair. “No, wait, listen! Chelsea’s Skill is incredible and very likely to put her in danger, so I thought I’d marry her and keep her safe and protected...”

“I agree that it would be easy for you to protect her. But you can’t marry someone one-sidedly! I’d feel so bad for Chelsea if she had to put up with you her entire life~!”

“You’ve got some nerve suddenly trying to keep your savior, Royz,” Lord Glen bellowed, shocking me by using a lower tone than I’d ever heard him use before.

“Damn, I can’t take both of you on at the same time...” Lord Royz finally got up before kneeling before me. “Allow me to say it again. I thank you for curing my illness. I can’t marry you, but I swear that I

will always be your ally.”

I had no idea what to say back.

“The Elixir Seed is incredibly dangerous. We should keep its existence secret,” he continued worriedly.

“Um, ah, uh... Thank you for worrying about me,” I managed to squeeze out.

He started wriggling before me. “Lady Chelsea is just so cute, I can’t hold myself back...!”

“You *lolicon*!”

“No! Beastmen can change their physical age and size on a whim, so we don’t judge based on appearances! We fall in love with their hearts!”

Lord Glen and Lord Royz were talking, but I couldn’t hear them.

+ + +

“I’ve gotta give you something as thanks,” said the former Emperor, pulling a small box out of his Item Box. “Open it up.”

Following his instructions, I opened it. Inside was a necklace with a round, dark stone in it. An emblem I’d never seen before was carved into the stone.

“That’s an Anti-Poison necklace. If you eat anything poisonous or get covered in poison, it’ll get negated as long as you’re wearing it. It’ll definitely help you in the future, so take it.”

“Thank you,” I said, immediately putting it on. But for some reason, Lord Glen looked really grim as I did...

“Now that I’m better, let’s change the spot we plant the Spirit Tree to the imperial capital,” Lord Royz announced, gripping his fist tightly. “I’ll beat the crap out of Bearsley and make a comeback as the Emperor.”

Miss Micah’s tail started wagging when he said that.

“If I’m Emperor, I’ll be living in the capital, after all. It’d be best to plant it somewhere I could protect it.”

Both Lord Glen and I nodded.

“So I’d love to get going right now, but...I need some time to recover.”

Drinking the liquid in the Elixir Seed had restored his mana, but it hadn’t done anything about his health. Since he’d been near empty, he would’ve also been constantly exhausted and having a hard time breathing, so it would affect his health, too.

“Then let’s celebrate your recovery~! I’ll make lots of yummy food~!” Miss Micah said, heading to the kitchen with the tip-tap of her footsteps ringing out.

“I’ll be better by morning, so try to use up as many ingredients as you can,” Lord Royz yelled after her.

“I know! Once we’re back at the castle, I don’t know if they’ll let me cook, so I’ll make as much as I can today~!” she yelled back.

“Let me help!” I said automatically, getting caught up in all the excitement.

+ + +

As we set out the cooked food on the low table and dining table, Lord Glen put his hand to his lips, murmuring the names of all the dishes.

“Chinese Rice Porridge... Miso Nikomi Udon... Tamagoyaki... Nikkorogashi... Pickled veggies...”

“Most of what Micah cooks should be eaten with chopsticks, but that might be a bit hard for Lady Chelsea and the knights. You can use a fork,” Lord Royz said, miming using his chopsticks to pick something up. I tried picking them up, but I had no idea how to hold them.

Lord Glen looked as if he was appreciating his happiness, grabbing some chopsticks and making the same motions as Lord Royz.

“Okay then, *itadakimasu!*”

“*Itadakimasu~!*”

“*Itadakimasu...*”

After Lord Royz said it, Miss Micah and Lord Glen repeated it, but what did it mean?

When I looked confused, Lord Royz explained with a grin, “You say a little prayer to the gods before you eat, right? I thank the chef and the ingredients. That’s what *Itadakimasu* means.”

I always prayed to the earth gods before I ate, meaning ‘Thank you for giving me this food. I’ll enjoy it.’ It seemed to be the same thing. “Okay... *Itadakimasu.*”

As I mimicked the three of them, Lord Glen gave me a gentler smile than usual... Actually, more sweet. My heart skipped a beat, but it vanished as he started eating happily. *What was that?*

“This takes me back... They’re all so good...” He looked as if he was about to cry as he slowly and carefully ate each dish.

I only ate a little bit of each thing, but it was all delicious.

“Looks like Chelsea likes the tamagoyaki~”

“It’s just a bit sweet... Wait, how did you know?”

“You’ve eaten more of that than anything else~! I’ll keep that in mind for later~!” Miss Micah said, pulling out a notebook and writing something down.

“Eating all this yummy food will probably grow my mana pool...” I said, chewing thoroughly. Lord Royz gave me a confused look.

“Recent research has shown that eating a good amount of delicious food will increase your max mana,” explained Lord Glen.

“I see... It is true that beastmen who are well-off and eat more good food have bigger mana pools than others,” Lord Royz nodded along.

“Where’d you get all the ingredients for this...?”

“I’ve got a spot within the empire where we’re producing rice, miso, soy sauce—everything. We can only make a little bit, so we never exported any. It’s all been halted since the miasma came in, since everything’s turned into wastelands, but once things are back to normal, I can export some of it.”

“We’re gonna save Radzuel, no matter what!” For some reason, Lord Glen got super motivated when he heard that.

Interlude 3: Glen and Royz

Going back in time a bit...

Miss Micah, the foxwoman who was both a chef and Royz's envoy, headed to the kitchen, and Chelsea followed to help. While they were gone, Royz and I talked about things we didn't want them hearing.

"Ele had told me that it'd been a while since he met another [Reincarnator], so I knew that there had to be others, but I'd never expected to meet one," I said.

"You'd be the sixth one I've met in all my years. It seems we appear every century or so."

"You said you'd been ruling for a hundred years, didn't you?"

"Yeah. Spent my first five hundred or so wandering, then I became the Emperor because I was so bored. Once I was, I had fun treating it like a town-building game, and before I knew it, it'd been a hundred years," Royz said with a smirk.

"I'm smelling some things I sorely missed from the kitchen. Is Miss Micah making Japanese food?"

"Yup! I picked her up while I was wandering, and eventually when she awakened to the [Cooking] Skill, I taught her everything I knew. Now she can make all the Japanese, Chinese, and Western meals from our past lives."

"So that's where the medicinal cooking stuff came from..."

"By eating that, I kept myself going. No beastmen ever thought of eating such things. They're all musclebrains, thinking they're fine just eating salted meat..."

"So the current Emperor is a musclebrain too, huh..."

He sighed deeply when I said that. "I kept watch and gave him some advice for a while, but when my illness got worse, so did his attitude. Before I knew it, I'd been exiled."

"He must've thought he could do it all without you."

"That fake fortune teller was always with him, giving him advice. That probably made him think that. When I used my Sage-level [Appraisal] on him, I was shocked to see that his class was Swindler. Now that I think about it, there was something else weird there," he said, looking into the distance as he remembered. "He also had 'Worshiper of the Proxy, Driven by Envy' as a second class, with 'Blessing: Ash of the Spirit Tree of Origin' showing. I ran out of mana and collapsed while I was trying to read the ash's effect, so I don't

know anything else, but I wonder what it meant...”

“There are way too many words I’m interested in there,” I said, confused. “I don’t even know where to start. Who is the Proxy?”

“You know that many gods created the world back in the age of mythology, right?”

I nodded.

“The gods created the world, but the Proxy and Spirit King were the ones who brought it to prosperity. That’s what was written in the texts I could read once I became Emperor.”

I immediately looked over to the King of Spirit’s temporary kitten form, asking, “Really?”

Ele was looking down, but he nodded. «...There were various races in the world that the gods created, but nothing else. She and I worked tirelessly to make the world richer.»

“So the Proxy was a woman. Is she still in this world?”

«I do not know. I did not have a contract with Her, so I cannot sense Her location.»

“You helped Her without making a contract, huh...” muttered Royz.

Ele lifted his head, blinking. «Now that you mention it, that’s true. I used my powers to help Her, without ever making a contract. She was someone whose happiness made you want to lend your assistance... How strange...» After muttering that, he curled up on top of the box and fell asleep, seemingly telling us he wouldn’t say any more.

“Changing the subject here, but Chelsea’s Skill is really something.”

“Yeah... It’d be easy for her to destroy the world.”

“If she made a Charm seed or something, she could take it over.”

I froze at his suggestion. I hadn’t thought about that.

“And if she handed out seeds that could endlessly produce food while Radzuel is still in a famine, she might even be made a Saint.”

I *had* thought of that, so I nodded. “She’s promised to always talk to me before making seeds, and never to make any bad ones, but I don’t know how far it’d go...”

“That’s why I wanted to marry her... Jokingly. But she’d be under my protection here.”

“It’s true, just being under the King of Chronowize’s brother’s protection wouldn’t really mean much to other countries.”

Royz smirked. “The necklace I just gave her has my crest carved in it.”

“You don’t mean... Proof of your engagement?”

“Nope. Proof that I’m her guardian. Micah has the same one. Ask her later if you’re worried.”

I nodded, despite not fully believing him, and headed to the kitchen where the girls were.

“If you’re that worried, you should just propose yourself...”

I pretended I didn’t hear what he muttered...

5. Power is Justice

The next morning, after eating the breakfast that Miss Micah made for us, we headed for the capital of Radzuel. I'd thought we'd be taking a carriage, but Lord Royz said he'd turn into a dragon and carry us there...!

"I did a lot of freight carrying before I became Emperor," he explained, pulling a horseless ten-seat carriage from his Item Box. Apparently, we couldn't bring horses because they'd be scared. Before changing forms, he warned, "I'm gonna transform, but don't get too surprised, okay?"

He had a long, snake-like body, a mane like a horse, and legs in the same spots as a lizard. I'd never seen anything like it. *The dragons in fairy tales had big wings...*

"So you're an eastern-style dragon instead of western, huh," said Lord Glen.

Lord Royz smirked. "I'm the only dragonman who looks like this. Everyone is amazed because I can fly without wings."

"Huh? You can fly?" I asked, shocked, only to get a strong nod in return.

"Come on, hop in!"

Lord Glen, Miss Micah, and I, plus the four guardian knights, the box holding the cutting, and Ele on top of it all piled into the carriage... Lord Royz picked it up with us inside, placed it on his palm, and flew up into the sky. It was so strange how we were in a carriage, but weren't shaking...

"You can see the clouds~" Miss Micah pointed out.

I looked out the little window and saw that there were a bunch of white clouds floating in the blue sky. *So we're high enough to be at the same level as the clouds we usually look up at!* Looking down, the trees on the mountains were withered, turned brown and yellow. You could also see a light dark-colored mist covering the ground. The same dark-colored mist was also floating around the fields in the distance, so everything there must've been dead, too. There were also some people walking around, but just the immediate area around them didn't have any dark mist.

"Everyone carries around their Spirit Tree shard~ But the area of effect keeping the miasma away is really small," Miss Micah explained, pulling out her own shard. "A shard this tiny can only

protect Micah~ The knights beside me wouldn't get any protection."

The knights balked at her words. None of us had Spirit Tree shards. *Won't we be consumed by the miasma once we land?*

«Though there is a cutting here, as well...I have given you a Spirit Tree bracelet. That should repel the miasma of a space about the size of this dragon.»

That was about the size of Lord Royz's home. I looked at the bracelet on my wrist when Ele mentioned it, and it sparkled. But apparently, Miss Micah couldn't understand Ele in his kitten form. Her eyes widened in surprise when I explained what the bracelet could do.

"That's amazing~! No one else would have anything like that! Branches from Spirit Trees just break when you bend them. I can't believe one was made into a circle like that~!" she said, getting heated up. "With that, your knights should be protected from the miasma~ They'll be able to fight without worrying~!"

The four knights in the carriage all relaxed when they heard this.

"I hope we can plant it soon. It'd keep the miasma out of the area, so I want to do it as soon as possible."

Ele nodded. «Because I must protect this branch, I cannot purify the miasma. I also want this to be planted quickly.»

While we were talking, we came close enough to see the imperial capital. It was amazing how we managed a fifteen-day carriage ride in half a day by flying! Unlike the capital of Chronowize, the imperial capital wasn't enclosed.

"There are no walls?" I asked, getting a nod back from Miss Micah.

"Since strength is number one in Radzuel, the strongest people have lived on the outskirts of the capital. Then, they'd show their strength by defeating monsters and criminals who came here~ There've never been any walls, since they were basically begging to be attacked."

So the capital was protected by strong people rather than walls. I was surprised at how different their thoughts were from us back in Chronowize.

In the middle of the capital was a strange looking castle with a round roof and a big dueling stadium. There weren't any high walls around the castle, either. *How do they protect the Emperor, then?*

When I asked, Miss Micah answered again, lifting a finger as she explained, "The Emperor is the strongest person in Radzuel, so they don't need to be protected. You've gotta challenge them to a fair and square duel if you wanna fight them. There's absolutely no surprise attacks allowed!"

"What would happen if someone did try it, though?" Lord Glen asked.

She grinned. "If someone won because they launched a surprise attack, every citizen in the empire would chase them to the ends of the earth and beat 'em up~!"

It seemed that despite her soft exterior, Miss Micah liked fighting.

Lowering the carriage down into the castle's courtyard, Lord Royz changed back to demi-human form. And once we all got out of the carriage, it disappeared, as if it'd been waiting.

After we'd landed, various people gathered around us. They were all staring at Lord Royz in shock. After a bit of time, the crowd parted, and a very large man came through. There were cute round ears poking out from his short hair, and it, his eyes, and his clothes were all brown. It was the Current Emperor Bearsley, looking just as he had in the portrait.

"Royz, huh," he said, glaring at the former Emperor.

"Been a while, huh, Bearsley?" Lord Royz was looking down at him, smiling like a demon lord would. I was a little surprised at how different it was from his usual smirk, but it suited him.

"The hell are you here for? If you've got any complaints, tell me 'em after you win our duel. Oh wait, you won't be winning anything with a body like that!" Lord Bearsley laughed loudly, just like a villain in a story.

"My illness has been cured."

"What?! It wasn't something that could be cured! Stop lyin'!"

"You'll see once we fight. So, I challenge the current Emperor Bearsley to a duel!" The crowd buzzed with excitement after he announced it. "You're in way over your head. I can't retire like this."

Most of the people looked happy, but some were averting their gazes, and others were fidgeting restlessly.

"Fine. It's my duty as Emperor to accept any challenges to duels. Let's get to the stadium!"

At his declaration, the entire crowd headed towards the duel stadium. Just as I was about to join the crowd, Lord Glen grabbed my hand.

"Let's hold hands so we don't get separated."

I readily agreed, since I was a bit scared about all the tall adults around.

"Hm? For some reason, there's no miasma around us," someone in the crowd said, triggering a chain of confused muttering from the others. Since we had both the box with the cutting and my Spirit Tree bracelet, the area around us was clear of the dark mist. Some of the people made the connection that our group was in the center of the miasma-free zone, and looked at us with shock.

"I will be the referee," a well-dressed dog-eared man announced as we arrived at the stadium, standing between Emperor Bearsley and

Lord Royz. "The duel will be between the current Emperor and the former Emperor. If there are any objections, speak now."

None of the people gathered stepped forward, continuing to just watch.

"It seems that there are no objections. I will explain the rules."

The rules were very simple. You'd lose if you admitted defeat, lost consciousness, or left the bounds of the stadium.

"The final rule is that the match will be ruled invalid if one side dies. Are you ready?" the referee asked.

Emperor Bearsley transformed into a bear, while Lord Royz stayed humanoid.

"Let's go."

"Just you try, you convalescent!" roared Emperor Bearsley.

"Oh, that's right. I might just be getting over my illness, but...I'm not gonna go easy on you," Lord Royz said, smiling his demonic smile with his hands on his hips. The Emperor drew the sword from his hip, standing ready.

"Start!"

Emperor Bearsley charged as soon as the referee said the word. You could hear the thunk of his footsteps, so he must have been quite heavy.

Lord Royz, on the other hand, stayed exactly where he was, deflecting the sword with one hand while grabbing the bear by the throat and lifting him. Then...he threw him. Far. I was shocked at how easily he was flung... *How far is he gonna go?*

While I was there surprised, Emperor Bearsley flew outside of the stadium, landing with a bang. As he did, some people rushed outside.

The referee bowed reverently to Lord Royz. "Lord Bearsley is out of bounds... The winner is Emperor Royz!"

As the stadium erupted in cheers, Lord Royz pumped his fist into the air. "I'm the Emperor now! From now on, I'm gonna increase the number of Spirit Trees in the country, and make it even better! Get ready!" he yelled.

All at once, the crowd ran to him, gathering around him.

"Kyaa!" I cried, nearly crushed by the rushing crowd.

That was when Lord Glen pulled me close, protecting me. My heart sped up, beating loudly at the sudden gesture. He held me like that for a while as the stampede died down. After that, we started hearing drums and flutes from somewhere. Looking over to where the sounds were coming from, we saw a big palanquin pass overhead. Lord Royz got on it, striking a strange pose before he was carried towards the castle.

I was gawking, not really understanding what just happened, and Lord Glen looked down at me.

“That was a lot, huh?”

When I nodded, he let me go, grabbing hold of my hand again.

The crowd scattered in all directions, yelling things like “Time for a festival!”, “Things’re gonna get busy!”, and “We’ve gotta get ready now!”

Miss Micah was smiling happily, hands on her hips. “Let’s all get going to the castle~!”

Staring at the palanquin carrying Lord Royz in the distance, we headed in the direction of the castle.

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Once we arrived at the castle, someone came to guide us to the meeting room. All the while, Lord Glen and I kept holding hands.

Entering the room, we saw that Lord Royz was sitting in the farthest seat, while various other beastmen surrounded him. They were all speaking to him reverently about something or other.

“The ones in yellow are civil officials, and the ones in red are with the military~” Miss Micah explained from where she stood behind us.

After some time, the beastmen finished their conversation and Lord Royz finally looked up at us.

“You all must have known, but I was ill. The ones who cured me were Prince Glenarnold and Lady Chelsea—from the neighboring country of Chronowize! If not for them, I wouldn’t have been able to retake the throne! Treat them as honored guests!”

All of the officials turned to look at us, each with different expressions. One gave us a short bow, another stayed straight-faced, another smirked, and one even glared down at us in disdain. Other than that, there was one who frowned and another who smiled welcomingly.

I started shaking, scared of all of the different stares we were getting, but Lord Glen gave our linked hands a little squeeze. The reminder that I wasn’t alone gave me a bit of comfort.

“So how long are you going to have us standing around here?” Lord Glen asked, heaving a big sigh.

“Sorry about that. Make ’em feel welcome!”

At Lord Royz’s words, a servant-like beastman reluctantly brought us some chairs. We both sat down, but Miss Micah stayed standing diagonally behind us.

“...Looks like there are a lot more baddies here than there were three years ago~” she murmured.

“So we’re behind enemy lines, huh...” muttered Lord Glen quietly.

“Why are the two of them in the meeting room?”

First to speak up was the straight-faced deer-eared civil official. Then, a rabbit-eared military official continued, frowning.

“Do you plan to take a play out of Bearsley’s book and listen to foreign humans?”

“These two are necessary to the Radzuel Empire’s recovery. There’s no way my Sage-level [Appraisal] would be wrong.”

The rabbit-eared official closed his lips tightly, bowing his head at Lord Royz’s response.

“Anyone else have any problems with this?”

“S-Shouldn’t we handle recovery ourselves instead of relying on inferior humans from other countries...?” A fox-eared civil official argued, shaking like a leaf as he did. At his words, several others spoke up, agreeing.

“What’s a dummy fox like that doing as an official~ ...Bearsley must’ve appointed him. I can’t believe it~!”

I could tell that Miss Micah *really* didn’t like the fox-eared official...

“Then you can go get more Spirit Trees for us,” Lord Royz told him, resting his chin on his hands.

“...All of the Spirit Trees within our borders have been destroyed, so... Um...”

“And how do you expect us to fix that without relying on other countries? Without the trees, we’re not gonna get any Spirits here to purify the miasma. Your parents must’ve told you that much when you were a kid. Even orphans know the story.” Lord Royz took a deep breath before quietly continuing, “Give it a rest. I’ve no need for people who just wanna look down on others and complain without offering any solutions of their own. Get out of my castle.”

The room went silent at his words, and the fox-eared official (still shaking like a leaf) was thrown out of the meeting room by a soldier. After that, every official who had agreed with him was told to leave as well. In the end, the only ones left were the straight-faced deer-eared civil official and the rabbit-eared military official. Once all of the others were gone, they bowed deeply to both Lord Glen and me.

“Finally, some peace and quiet,” Lord Royz said, taking a breath.

Interlude 4: Ele and Bearsley

Ele, in his kitten form, hadn't moved an inch from his spot on the wooden box since the group had left Chronowize. Inside said box was the branch to be used for the cutting, on which Ele had to constantly use magic to keep fresh. Because of that, he was getting more and more fatigued, and was nearing his limit. Really, he wanted it planted ASAP...but he never said a word, staying patient.

Even after the group was brought to Radzuel's capital by dragon-form Royz, the box, and by extension, Ele himself, was carried by the guardian knights. They had also been carrying him and the box while Royz defeated Bearsley and retook his seat as Emperor. It was just when they were about to follow him and the others to the castle...

"You guys've got somethin' good, don't ya? Gimme."

The former Emperor, Bearsley the bearman, stood before them. The group of knights stayed silent, trying to ignore him as they passed, but they were soon surrounded by imperial citizens.

Bearsley was aware that his own actions had brought chaos to the empire and caused the famine. He had planned to leave before he was made to take responsibility, but...the fortune teller who had stuck with him until the end had said:

"If you stay in the empire, all that will be left for you is a life of crawling in the dirt. The wooden box that those knights are carrying holds a very large Spirit Tree shard. The fact that they are unaffected by the miasma around us is proof. With that, you would receive a warm welcome in any foreign country."

Having been born in a very poor village, Bearsley had lived like that once before and wasn't about to live like it again. Couple this with the added temptation of special treatment in whatever country he ran to...

"I know you've got some Spirit Tree in that box. You should hand it over if you value your lives."

The bearman's words put the citizens into predator mode.

"Did he just say Spirit Tree?!"

"If we had that, our fields..."

"I could give it to the newly born kids..."

Thanks to all of the Spirit Trees being chopped down, the fields and mountains were withered due to the flood of miasma. Each empire citizen was given a very tiny shard, but there weren't any for

newborn children. To these people fraught with fear for the unknown future, of course they'd go mad at any mention of Spirit Trees.

One beastman swayed unsteadily to the guards, clinging to them. "If I had that, I could give it to my daughter! Please, give it to me!"

It was only a second before others joined in. All of the citizens grabbed and clung to the knights. But not a single one tried to take it by force. They all just cried, begging.

Because none of the citizens were carrying weapons or attacking, the knights couldn't lift a hand against them. As they stood there paralyzed, the sky suddenly turned dark. It was Bearsley, transformed into a massive bear, leaning over them and plucking the box from their hands. Though they tried to take it back, the clinging citizens stopped them in their tracks.

For better or worse, Ele was still on top of the box in his kitten form. «Of all the times, this had to happen while I can't use my powers...!» he muttered. Since he was using all of his mana to preserve the cutting, he was completely unable to do anything else.

As Bearsley walked away, he gradually shrunk. "Huh? What's with this kitten?"

«You were the one that carried me away...»

"Can't be a catperson, since I don't understand what it's sayin'. Doesn't really matter if it's a normal cat."

It seemed that Bearsley didn't understand the exhausted Spirit's words. Finally regaining full humanoid form, he disappeared into the hustle and bustle of the imperial capital.

6. Disaster

After all of the officials other than the deer-eared and rabbit-eared ones were chased out, we sat down again at the table, this time at a distance from which we could actually see each other's faces.

"Let me introduce them again. This is the younger brother of Chronowize's King, and Appraiser, Prince Glenarnold. And this is Lady Chelsea, the one who saved my life."

I stood briefly, giving a curtsy as Lord Royz explained.

"Honestly, I had given up on thinking you'd be saved. I'm shocked to see your mana levels the same as they were in your heyday. Thank you so much, Lady Chelsea." The previously straight-faced deer-eared civil official broke out into a smile before bowing deeply.

"Due to the previous emperor believing in some strange foreign fortuneteller which ended up harming the country, I doubted the both of you," said the rabbit-eared military official with a frown, apologizing with a bow so deep he smashed his head on the table in front of us.

Lord Glen and I looked at each other, both smiling a bit forcedly.

"Now, let's get things started," Lord Royz said, prompting all of us to straighten up. "Prince Glen and Lady Chelsea have prepared a Spirit Tree cutting for us. We'll be going to plant it in a moment, but where should it go?"

The deerman official looked deep in thought, resting his hand on his mouth, while the rabbitman official just tilted his head.

"It would be best if it was somewhere close enough for you to protect it," the deerman mused, standing and moving to look out the meeting room's window. "Maybe between here and the are— Huh?!"

"What's wrong?"

"Oh. I was just surprised to see the previous emperor Lord Bearsley grow so large, but he's walked off towards the city."

"We need to get him to tell us everything he's had done over these three years. Send out an order to arrest him, his fake fortune teller, and anyone related to them."

"Yes!" The rabbit-eared military official jumped to action, leaving the room.

After that, Lord Royz and the remaining official discussed things for a while, and it was decided the cutting would be planted between the castle and the stadium.

“Now that that’s settled, let’s get that thing planted!”

Hearing that, I looked around. *Now that I think of it, none of the knights are here. They were the ones carrying the box with the cutting...* Did we get separated somewhere on the way to the castle? Just as I was thinking that, the door opened again. In walked the rabbitman official and the knights.

“These people are claiming to be part of His Highness’ group, but...”

All of the knights’ clothing was in tatters, and their hair all messed up.

“Your Highness! I apologize... Both the box and the kitten have been taken by the former Emperor,” reported one knight, before collapsing on the ground.

“Ele’s been taken?!” I stood up, shocked. He’d said he couldn’t purify the miasma because he needed to protect the cutting. Wouldn’t that mean he couldn’t do anything against Lord Bearsley? “Oh no...” I whispered, gripping my hands together.

But when I did that, I noticed my thumbnail sparkle. That shining nail was proof of my contract with Ele. After looking at it for a moment, I felt as if I could somehow tell what direction Ele was in.

As I worried about everything, the guardian knights had explained what had happened to them.

Lord Royz’s expression turned grim. “It was my fault for leaving you when there was risk of a riot. I’m sorry,” he apologized, bowing to us. Then... “Start the search immediately!” He gave the order without giving Lord Glen or the knights a chance to interject.

“Um...” It was kind of awkward to say right after he ordered a search, but I raised my hand slightly.

“What’s wrong?” Lord Royz asked, looking down at me.

“I can tell where the cutting is. Or rather, where Ele is.”

Everyone looked at me, confused.

“It might be because I’m contracted to him, but it seems I can tell what direction he’s in,” I continued, closing my eyes and pointing where I felt him from.

“Ele said he couldn’t leave the box, right?”

“Yes,” I replied, giving a small nod.

Lord Glen gave a small sigh. “I don’t want to put you in any danger, but the only thing we can do is rely on you.”

“We’ve got no choice,” said Lord Royz, standing before scooping me up in his arms.

“Wha?!” While I was surprised, he started walking.

“Must be tough not realizing your feelings,” he muttered as we passed Lord Glen.

“...I’ve already noticed.”

I'd never seen that look on Lord Glen's face before. I was carried off while I was still in shock.

+ + +

"That way," I said, pointing towards where Ele was as I sat on Lord Royz's arm.

The rabbit-eared official had already put the call out to arrest Bearsley, so there were lots of soldiers around the capital. They cleared our path so that we could go through quickly.

"Huh? It's here..." Apparently, Ele and the box were still being carried off somewhere. "It feels like it's under us," I clarified, pointing to the ground.

"He's in the tunnels. That's a pain," Lord Royz grumbled, putting his free hand to his chin as he thought. "They exit outside the city. He's probably going that way."

And so, we headed for the exit to the tunnels with a group of soldiers. As we waited quite a far bit away, Lord Bearsley appeared, holding the wooden box.

"Damn! You could've meowed a bit more," he said, complaining at Ele, who was sitting on the box.

Oh no, did he do something to Ele...?! I was about to jump out, but Lord Royz stopped me.

"I shouldn't have just mindlessly thrown him. Gotta rake Bearsley over the coals properly this time," he muttered, before looking over to Lord Glen. "You wanna do it?"

For some reason, Lord Glen was staring at Lord Royz angrily. "Yeah...I will," he replied, his voice very low.

Ele's important to Lord Glen too, huh! Glad, I nodded to him.

"I'll keep her safe, don't worry~ I'm Lord Royz's pupil, after all!" Miss Micah said, hugging me tight as we hid and watched them all. We were a bit far away from Lord Bearsley, but the area was surrounded by soldiers to keep him from running. The door to the tunnels was locked from the inside. He seemed to finally notice both Lord Royz and Lord Glen when he heard the lock click.

"W-What are you doing here?!" he cried, eyes wide.

«You're finally here,» said Ele, before plopping down from on top of the box, clearly exhausted.

Oh no! Is he okay? We need to do something for him, quick!

Lord Glen began, as if he heard my wish. "...Icicle Lance."

Spears of ice came into being around him, before flying quickly towards Lord Bearsley's feet. The beastman managed to dodge them all, but ended up throwing the box as he did. Lord Royz jumped in, catching both the wooden box and the Spirit kitten.

"I'll [Cure] you if you live through this."

“W-What did I even do to you?!” screeched Lord Bearsley in fear.

“I’m just...taking my anger out on you! ...*Ice Wall*.”

This time, three walls of ice grew from the ground, surrounding the bearman. Only his path to Lord Glen remained unblocked.

“Uooooooooaaaarrgh!” Lord Bearsley roared, charging to tackle Lord Glen, still humanoid.

“...*Barrier*.”

An invisible wall appeared around Lord Glen, repelling Lord Bearsley with a strange ‘ping’ sound. The former emperor’s back hit one of the ice walls. It sounded the same as the barrier back in Chronowize.

Lord Bearsley shakily rose to his feet, drawing the sword from his hip. “I went easy on you because you’re unarmed, but not anymore!”

“Hmm. Since you got your weapon out, I’ll be thorough in my beating.”

After that, Lord Glen apparently used a lot of different magic to beat him up. Miss Micah covered my eyes partway through, so I only saw a bit, but she said it was really amazing.

“Glen’s really great with magic. He might even be on my level if we fought,” commented Lord Royz.

“Cure only his external wounds, leaving the pain from any bruises — [Cure].”

It was only after Lord Glen used his [Cure] Skill on Lord Bearsley that Miss Micah stopped hugging me and let go. Bearsley was collapsed on his knees, head hanging. His clothes were ripped up here and there, and his hair was a mess, but all of his wounds were healed. He was taken away by some soldiers.

At the same time, Lord Glen, Lord Royz, and Ele with his box came back over to me. The little kitten lay collapsed, sleeping.

“Is Ele okay?” I asked.

Lord Glen used his [Appraisal] Skill for me, checking him over. “His mana is really low, but he’s just sleeping. He’s not hurt. Since he was awake when he’d usually be sleeping, he just wasn’t able to regenerate his mana.”

I was finally able to relax a bit when I heard that. “Thank goodness...”

“We need to get that cutting planted and let him off the hook as soon as possible.”

I nodded at his words.

+ + +

On the way back to the castle, Lord Glen insisted on carrying me, for some reason. “I can walk on my own...!” I protested, but he didn’t let me down. Lord Royz, who was carrying the box, and Miss Micah,

who was walking beside him, only laughed at us. I had to give up and let myself be carried, only for Ele to wake up at the same time.

«Thank goodness that annoying man is gone,» he said, stretching out on top of the wooden box.

“What do you mean?”

«The man was terrified the entire time we were in the tunnels, and wouldn’t stop singing! It was hell listening to his tone-deaf song that close!» the Spirit answered, shrugging his little shoulders.

“That must’ve been tough,” I mumbled.

Ele looked at both Lord Glen and me before shrugging again. «Yes, it was. But I’m at my limit. Please, plant the cutting soon,» he replied, bowing his head.

“...So cute!” I leaned out towards him, forgetting I was in Lord Glen’s arms.

“I don’t want to drop you, so hold on tight,” said Lord Glen, hugging me close. He did it so intensely that I squeaked a bit.

“Let’s go back to the castle *after* planting the cutting,” said Lord Royz, struggling to stop himself from laughing.

Once we got to just about the middle point between the castle and stadium, he stopped.

“I’d like it somewhere around here.”

It was a wide plaza, empty aside from some food carts a bit away. The Spirit Tree that I planted outside the Royal Research Institute grew really big, so the resulting one from the cutting would definitely grow big, too.

I nodded to Lord Royz in agreement, and he had the soldiers herd the citizens away from the immediate area. They watched us from a distance, seemingly very interested in what was going on.

Lord Glen put me down, and Lord Royz handed me the box with the cutting. Ele, who had still been on top of it, moved to my shoulder. I set the box on the ground and took the lid off.

“Wow~ It’s so pretty!” I heard Miss Micah cry from behind me.

As I took the sparkling glass-like cutting branch (which was honestly more like a mace) out of the wooden box, Ele whispered to me, «You should use your bracelet’s storage function on the box.»

I did as he said, wishing for the Spirits to hold it for me, and it vanished.

“Should I make a hole for it?” I asked, only for Ele to shake his head.

«Just plunge it into the earth.»

I sat down, holding the cutting in both hands before stabbing it into the ground. The moment I did, it shined so brightly that I couldn’t keep my eyes open. When I slowly opened them again, the cutting was spreading its branches, rapidly growing.

“Wow...” I looked up, watching as it grew taller and taller, only to nearly fall backwards myself.

“That’s dangerous,” Lord Glen chided me, catching me before I fell.

“Thank you.”

While I was thanking him, the Spirit Tree had grown up to about the height of the Institute’s second floor. Looking closely, the tree was emitting a soft light, repelling the miasma.

«It seems that the miasma has been pushed away to the surrounding mountains,» Ele commented, leaning forward from his perch on my shoulder.

“It’s not hard to breathe anymore... Did the miasma disappear?”

“I think it just can’t get close anymore.”

“Whatever the case, it was wrong to cut down the Spirit Trees!”

Lord Royz grinned at his citizen’s conversations.

«It should grow slowly from now on. Make sure to protect it,» Ele ordered, acting quite high and mighty.

After I backed up a few steps to look up at the tree, something rained down from above. It was red, translucent, and falling like some sort of down.

I heard the crowd begin to buzz.

There was a very large-chested woman with bright red hair and scarlet eyes, more beautiful than any being could ever be, and wearing a bright red mermaid dress that was long enough to hide her feet.

“Hello. My name is Irene. I’m the Spirit of Fire. Please, call me Rene.” The translucent red Fire Spirit, Rene, gave us an elegant mid-air greeting. It was different from a curtsy, but it still looked really sophisticated. Her hair was the same kind of bright red as my stepmother and half-sister had, but maybe because of her drooping eyes, she wasn’t scary in the least.

As I stared at her, enchanted, she smiled brightly at me. “Oh my! This generation’s Creator of the Spirit Trees is so small and cute!” she cried, floating over to me and clinging to me. But of course, since she was see-through, she went right through me.

While I was paralyzed in shock, Ele shouted at Rene from his spot on my shoulder, «Stop that! You’re bothering Lady Chelsea!» He floated up away from me, trying to scratch her. But a tiny kitten trying his best to scratch someone was just adorable instead of his intended threat. When I giggled, he stopped. «Get with the contracting!»

“Alright, alright. I know. I’ll contract with our cute little Creator... Wait, you’re already contracted to Lord Element? I can’t believe it!”

Rene floated away from me, flying around the Spirit Tree. The audience cried out in delight. It seemed that they’d heard the Fire

Spirit's introduction.

After flying for a bit, she stopped before me once again, looking quite meek. "I was shocked to see that Lord Element was contracted to anyone other than Her Ladyship the Proxy..."

Ele looked away as she said that.

"There's nothing I can do with her, then. I'll have to contract with someone else. Who to pick?"

"Would I work?" Lord Royz said, raising his hand. Rene looked him up and down, thinking. "I'm this here Radzuel Empire's Emperor, Royz."

"Oh, so you're an emperor? And a member of the longest living race in the world!"

Lord Royz gave her a confident smile. She'd never be able to guess that he'd been suffering from an illness up until yesterday.

"Okay! I'll make a contract with you," she said, before snapping her fingers.

The buzzing crowd suddenly froze completely. *Oh, that's right. Back when I contracted with Ele, he stopped time like this, too.* It seemed that since I was contracted with a Spirit already, I got to watch.

"I am the Spirit who rules over fire, Irene. I will form a contract with you here," she said with a smile, caressing his ring fingernail. As she did, it turned the same scarlet as her eyes. "Done!"

With another snap of her fingers, she vanished. The sounds of the crowd came back, signaling the end of the contract ceremony.

Lord Royz spent a while staring at his right ring fingernail, now scarlet.

«Call her name and summon her,» Ele suggested, still floating.

"Spirit of Fire, Rene," the dragonman called, with no hesitation. As he did, a large red bird flew down from between the leaves of the Spirit Tree, landing on his shoulder.

«You called, Lord Royz?»

"I'm gonna be rebuilding the Radzuel Empire. I'd like for you to help me."

«As you wish.»

It looked like Rene's temporary form was that of a large, bright red bird. Her wingspan was about the same as Lord Royz's height. *That's different from how Ele looks, huh?*

«Our temporary form changes based on our contractor's mana pool. The reason my form is a small kitten is because your mana pool is also small, Lady Chelsea.»

My shoulders sagged dejectedly when he said that.

"It's okay. You're eating lots of delicious food, and your mana pool is growing slowly but steadily," Lord Glen comforted me with his usual gentle smile, patting me on the head.

This time, we were led to a parlor on our return to the castle.

“I thank you for planting the Spirit Tree,” Lord Royz said from across the low table after we sat down on comfy sofas. “The Empire should be safe for now. I want to be relieved, but the miasma is still spreading rampant throughout places in the country other than the capital. I’d like for you to plant more cuttings.”

«We cannot,» Ele refused before Lord Glen or I had a chance to open our mouths. «As I told you before, branches for cuttings are not so easily made.»

“You said it would take a few years to make a large number. I still think it’s the best idea.”

Ele shook his head again. «Back when Lady Chelsea planted the second Origin Spirit Tree, I had also considered planting more Spirit Trees. I thought it would be best to plant them and call for more high-ranking Spirits to purify the miasma. But if there is another way, we should not increase the number of trees.»

After saying that, Ele asked for Lord Royz to clear the room.

«You may already know this, being a long-lived dragonman, but...» After giving his preamble, he took a deep breath before saying, «With the Spirit’s permission, travel between Spirit Trees is possible.»

“Eh?”

Everyone’s eyes widened in shock. Lord Royz was surprised too, so he must not have known after all.

“You mean like a Teleportation Circle...?” I asked, thinking back to the one I’d used back at the Royal Research Institute.

Ele nodded. «If I was to explain it in-depth, it would be someone entering the Spirit World through a tree and exiting from a different one, allowing for instantaneous travel over long distances.»

“Wouldn’t planting more and allowing for free travel be a good thing?” Lord Royz asked, putting a hand to his chin as he thought.

Ele in his kitten form drooped dejectedly, shaking his head but not giving an explanation. Rene stepped in to do it for him.

«Back in the times of the First Origin Spirit Tree, trees had been planted all over the continent. The people were able to live in convenient abundance, but they also forgot to give thanks,» she said with a sigh. «Having forgotten to give thanks to the Spirits and Spirit Trees, humanity became arrogant and even tried to oppress us. The Proxy became angry and burned the Origin Spirit Tree down. With the loss of the First tree, Lord Origin was forced to return to the Spirit World, and the other Spirits gradually returned as well.»

“So to avoid that happening again, you want to use another method than planting more Spirit Trees, if one exists,” Lord Glen

confirmed, summarizing what she said. Ele gave him a nod.

“It’s true that people forget to give thanks once they’re used to something. I spent my first hundred years as Emperor being a peaceful idiot, after all... So...what’s this other method?” Lord Royz asked.

Ele turned, looking at me. «We could use the seeds that Lady Chelsea creates.»

After that, we told them about the Blue Lily seeds I’d made back in the Sargent Margraviate.

“You mean those bright blue flowers that were growing in those wastelands we passed~?” Miss Micah asked, getting a nod back from Lord Glen.

I had made the seeds, but since no one else had seen what happened once they were planted, Lord Glen explained in detail for the rest of us.

«They bloom into bright blue flowers? And then once they absorb the miasma, they turn into fertilizer... What a revolutionary idea!» Rene, in her bird form, was about to fly off in excitement, but she suddenly froze. The parlor was a big room, but she’d break a vase or something if she spread her wings out.

“So you can make seeds like that, too... You’re really amazing, Lady Chelsea. Please, make some of those seeds for us!” Lord Royz said, bowing to me once again.

“Wait.” This time, it was Lord Glen who spoke before I had a chance to. “If we go with the blueprint we made back in the margraviate, Chelsea would be making Blue Lily seeds every day for a year.”

“That’s a bit...” *No, a lot of a problem... If I spent years making the same seed, my Skill research would be stopped. What should we do?*

«You just need to improve the seeds. My Mistress Lady Chelsea can make any seed she wishes for,» Ele said, as if he’d read my mind. He’d been so sad before, but now he was puffing out his chest proudly.

“We’ve improved on existing seeds before, but it’ll be a first for us to improve on a new seed she’d made.”

I nodded. “We’ll need to tell Lord Tris the results of our study...”

“Yep. He’ll probably pout about not being here to see it, though.”

Imagining Lord Tris pouting because he missed it made me break out into a grin.

And so, we wrote up an improved blueprint. Blue Lilies currently bloomed as soon as they were planted, absorbed any miasma in the area, and left one seed as they withered and became fertilizer. Our new and improved seeds would also bud as soon as they were planted, but wouldn’t bloom into a flower unless they absorbed miasma. In the event that they hadn’t bloomed in three days, they would wither and

become fertilizer. Once they absorbed miasma and bloomed, they'd drop ten more seeds, wither, and again, become fertilizer.

"Since the Blue Lilies in the margraviate didn't wither until they sucked up miasma, we made it so they'd only leave one seed. If they multiplied too much, they'd be bad for the ecosystem."

"So the improved version won't bloom unless it sucks in some miasma, and they'll wither within a few days otherwise, huh?"

"We have to think about what they could do to the other wildlife."

Lord Glen and Lord Royz were discussing the seeds, while I read the finished and improved blueprint over and over again to memorize the contents. Giving the others a little nod, I cast my Skill. "I'll make an improved Blue Lily following the blueprint exactly — [Seed Creation]."

A pale blue seed appeared with a light pop.

"It's apparently called a Sky Lily. The effects are exactly what we put in the blueprint."

"Damn, it's neat seeing Lady Chelsea's Skill at work. All of the seeds she makes are all so weird, there's no term for it but amazing."

Embarrassed from getting praised by Lord Royz, I made as many Sky Lily seeds as I could without fainting.

Lord Glen, Lord Royz, Miss Micah, and I headed outside of the imperial capital with some soldiers. Since the miasma dispersed when I was near due to my Spirit Tree bracelet, I had to watch them plant the seeds from far away. They planted them in a wasteland outside of the city's Spirit Tree's area of effect, and they bloomed the moment they were in the ground. In the next moment, they'd wither, dropping more seeds, which then bloomed into even more flowers.

As the process happened over and over and over again, the wasteland was transformed into a pale blue flower field.

After that, we all got on the carriage for Lord Royz to bring us back in his dragon form.

"It's like we're above the sky..." I whispered, thinking back to the sky I'd seen as we flew. Miss Micah, who was standing beside me as my guard, started wagging her tail.

7. Thanks

I spent another three days after that making Sky Lily seeds without tiring myself out. Since their seeds multiplied after blooming, unlike their Blue Lily cousins, I was told that I didn't have to make that many. And so it went by faster than it would have otherwise.

While I was busy making seeds, the former Emperor Lord Bearsley's questioning had finished. It seemed he might have been negatively affected by the miasma. According to him, the moment the Spirit Tree cutting was planted, it was as if a fog lifted. When questioned, he readily told them everything that happened since he became Emperor, leaving nothing out. He also said that the fake fortune teller had been the one to tell him he should steal the cutting, saying that he'd get preferential treatment in other countries because of it.

We still had no idea where the fake fortune teller had gone afterwards. From the man's personality, Lord Royz guessed that he might have already left the capital and headed outside the country.

«We have no idea what a weirdo like that may do, so please be careful,» Rene said, nuzzling me.

“So I've planted the cutting and made lots of Sky Lily seeds. Is there anything else?” I asked Lord Glen, only for him to shake his head.

“We can head back to Chronowize soon.”

“Alright,” I replied with a nod.

It would take years for all of the miasma in the Radzuel Empire to be absorbed by the flowers. I would have liked to see it happen, but I could come back to Radzuel's capital via the tree to see it after returning home.

“Can you make a little time for me once we get back to the Royal Research Institute?” he asked, looking kind of meek.

I nodded again, not seeing any reason to refuse, and he gave me a happy smile, different from his usual one. For some reason, it made my heart squeeze painfully.

I couldn't stop myself from wanting to know what he wanted to talk about immediately, so I asked, “Can we talk now instead?”

While he started thinking of how to answer, Miss Micah came to the guest room to lead us to the parlor.

When we arrived, Lord Royz, the deer-eared official, and the rabbit-eared official were all there, greeting us with smiles.

“I wanted to thank you again,” Lord Royz said, standing as Lord Glen and I sat on the sofa. The officials stood at the same time. “I thank you for planting the Spirit Tree cutting for the Radzuel Empire.”

All of the men bowed to us.

“Our countries will have to discuss reparations for Chronowize sending their research fellow at a later time, and I will give what is best. But other than that, I would like to thank Lady Chelsea personally as well.”

Not knowing what I should do, I looked over at Lord Glen for help, but he just smiled gently at me.

“So? What would you like?” Lord Royz asked with a grin, sitting directly in front of me.

I had nothing I wanted. I’d already been taken from the barony and given food, clothing, and a place to live. Since I’d become a research fellow, I didn’t need a place to work or money, either.

As I sat there worrying about how to answer, Ele hopped up onto my shoulder in his kitten form. «Lady Chelsea frequently overuses her mana and faints. Would you have any items that could increase her mana pool?»

Does something that handy actually exist?! I looked around at the others in shock, but they were all seemingly racking their brains. That probably meant that it didn’t...

After thinking for a while, Lord Royz plopped his fist on his other palm. “I’ll give you Micah, then!”

“What?!” *Miss Micah isn’t a thing.. How can you ‘give’ me her?*

While I worried, Lord Royz looked at me with a devilishly daring smirk on his face. “Micah’s a great chef, so she should be great for increasing your mana pool too, right?”

I thought back to when we ate her cooking to celebrate Lord Royz’s recovery. It *was* incredibly delicious, and I *had* thought it would help my mana pool...

“I love Chelsea, and I’ve wanted to try foreign food, so this’d be great~! I’d love to go with you~!” Miss Micah said, sitting down right beside me and meeting my gaze. She seemed worried, since her tail was all puffed up.

“Miss Micah isn’t a thing, so I can’t accept her as a gift. But if she would come along as a chef, I’d be very happy,” I replied, only to get a gentle pat on the head from Lord Glen.

“Yay~! I’ve been sick of taking care of Lord Royz~! If I’m gonna serve anyone, I want it to be a cute girl~!” The foxwoman raised both of her hands, cheering.

Lord Royz had a very odd look on his face when she said that. It

was angry, sad, annoyed, happy... A myriad of emotions packed into a smile.

“I’m kid-ding! I had to get back at you for treating me like a thing to give~!” she said, sticking her tongue out and laughing. Everyone else laughed, too.

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After our talks had finished and I’d returned to my guest room; the Fire Spirit Rene came to me in her bright red bird form. The only other people around were the guardian knights. Ele was over in Lord Glen’s room.

«I’ve got something I must tell you, Lady Chelsea.»

“What’s wrong?” I asked, confused.

Rene lifted one of her wings and gestured towards the bracelet on my wrist. «The Spirits in charge of your personal storage room are upset that you haven’t asked for their help.»

Thinking back, I hadn’t used it once since being told how it worked and put my bag of cookies inside.

“Ah... I’m sorry.”

«They don’t want you to apologize. They’d just like for you to use it,» the Spirit said, bringing out paper and a pen. «Seeing as how it must be difficult for you to think of physical things to put inside, I’ve thought up an alternate usage method. Please correspond with me.»

“Corre...spond?”

«I’ll give the Spirits in charge of your storage room letters for you from myself. I’d like for you to read them and send me letters back.»

“So it’s just writing letters?”

«Yes.»

Though I read, I hadn’t had many chances to actually write anything myself. Since my blueprints were basically the only thing I wrote out, I really wanted to try letters!

“Um... Is it okay if my handwriting is messy?”

«You can use your letters to practice.»

“Okay. I’ll write you letters, then.”

Hearing my response, Rene started spreading her wings happily, but held herself back once she realized. Had she spread them fully, the vase next to us would’ve definitely been broken...

«If you find yourself too busy to send any letters, you can leave a message for the Spirits. Please, do so.»

After that, she told me about how I could send items through my bracelet, or give the Spirits things as gifts. *There’s all kinds of things I didn’t know about this...*

«You may also use the Spirit Trees to travel to the Spirit World.»

“Really?”

She gave a small sigh when I asked. «Lord Element really should have been the one to explain things like this to you... He's such a typical, useless man,» she murmured, lowering her tone. «By going to the Spirit World, you can travel between Spirit Trees. You would be able to go from Radzuel to Chronowize in an instant.»

I'd heard Ele talk about that before, but no one mentioned that *I* could do that, so I wasn't sure what I should do... Seeing my worried expression, Rene shook her head.

«I'm not asking you to force yourself to use it. I'd just like for you to remember that if there is ever a time you're forced to evacuate Chronowize, you can escape to Radzuel.»

Understanding that she was just worried about my safety, I nodded.

8. Going Home?

The next day, we were to board a carriage and return to Chronowize.

“Unlike how you came, I’m not gonna be able to escort you to the border. I apologize.”

“You’ve got a lot on your plate now that you’re Emperor again. Don’t worry about it.”

While Lord Royz and Lord Glen spoke, an argument was breaking out between Rene the bright red bird and Ele the silver kitten.

«Why won’t you meet with the Proxy?»

«We were never contracted, so I do not know where she is.»

«Now that you mention it, you were forced back to the Spirit World automatically when the Origin Tree began to burn, weren’t you?» Rene said, nodding to herself. «The Proxy had continued living in the manor near the Origin Tree after it turned to ash. She might still be there.»

«Not one person told me that back in the Spirit World!»

«We were all under the impression you knew,» she laughed. «Then you must not know about the barrier raised around the Demonic Forest either, do you?»

«No, I do not. Tell me in detail.»

«I’ve got no choice, have I? Once the Origin Spirit Tree burned, the Proxy said that She would like to live in peace, and asked for a barrier to be raised!» the Spirit said, raising her wings happily. «The Proxy rarely ever asked for anything, so the other three Great Spirits and I fought over who could raise the best one!»

Hearing the Spirit’s conversation, Lord Glen and Lord Royz stopped their own, listening in.

«That’s why you would need to call one of the other Great Spirits to dispel the barrier if you go to see Her.» After saying that, she realized she was being watched, and screamed. «Whatever the case, go see Her and clear up your misunderstanding!»

The bird-form Spirit then flew up high into the sky. Though Ele heaved a great sigh, he didn’t try to follow her.

“What did she mean by ‘misunderstanding’?” I tried asking, but he only shook his head, staying silent.

Once we boarded the carriage and headed out, most of the scenery we passed was dried-up land. It made me feel awful. The

miasma would all be absorbed by the Sky Lilies in a few years, but what would happen to the rest of the land?

I looked between the view from the window down to my lap as I worried... After doing that a few times, Lord Glen spoke up from his spot across from me.

"I don't know what you're thinking if you don't put it into words. What's on your mind, and what do you want to do?"

Hesitating for a moment, I finally said what I'd thought many times since we'd arrived, "I'd like to make some seeds for the people suffering from the famine to use for food..."

He gave me a slightly strained smile before patting me on the head. I could see Miss Micah's eyes also sparkling beside me.

"What kind of seed would you make~?"

"Pumpkin."

The moment I said that, her tail started wagging. "Even the skin is edible, and they're full of nutrients! If you simmer them into a soup, then even little kids can eat them~! That'd be great~!"

"It's also good how you can even eat the insides of the seeds."

"They're delicious when lightly roasted~!"

"Every seed you make sprouts and grows. If the seeds are edible too, the chance of them growing out of control is low. And if it's a common type of seed, it probably wouldn't have any great influence. That should be fine."

With a small smile, I said, "I'd thought you would tell me not to. Thank you."

After saying that, I made as many pumpkin seeds as I could without tiring myself out. Using my bracelet, I stored the seeds I made in the Spirit World.

We decided to plant them at the rest stops along the way. Though they were used for letting the horses rest now, they had been used as nonaggression grounds in the past, where the beastmen fighting between themselves weren't allowed to fight. Even today, it was an unspoken rule that battles were forbidden there.

"Before the famine hit, the rest stops had different fruits growing every season~ Since everyone was allowed to eat what grew there, they'd be the best places place to plant the pumpkins~"

A while later, it was decided we'd take a break for the horses. There was a river flowing near the rest stop, but there was absolutely no greenery. Even the trees were dead and leafless.

"The edge of the rest stop is over there~" Miss Micah said, pointing. The three of us walked over to where she'd said.

"Please give me back three pumpkin seeds," I whispered, just for them to pop back out of storage. I caught them before they fell and gave one each to both Lord Glen and Miss Micah. Lord Glen nodded,

while the foxwoman wagged her tail. We all stuck our seeds in cracks in the dry ground.

“Please, let this help the people suffering from the famine...” I grasped my hands together, praying to the earth gods. As I did, the seeds sprouted—vines stretching out around them.

“These are gonna be fully grown pretty fast.”

He was right, because there were full grown pumpkins by the time we left. Miss Micah picked one up before hopping in the carriage.

Afterwards, we planted pumpkins every time we stopped to rest, and Miss Micah showed off the fully grown pumpkin in the inns we stayed at. The next day, people would head to the rest stops and share the pumpkins with each other. I saw it happening a few times.

News of the rest stop pumpkin fields had also reached the capital, according to the letter I got from Rene through my bracelet. She also attached a letter to Lord Glen from Lord Royz.

“He’s officially requesting for the Kingdom of Chronowize to send food to help with the famine. I’ve gotta get back to the royal capital ASAP to tell my brother...” muttered Lord Glen.

+ + +

Ten days had passed since we’d left Lord Royz and Rene, and we were another three days from the border when the incident occurred.

We had planted the pumpkin seeds and were chatting with the knights and soldiers who were accompanying us when a man dressed in all black appeared out of nowhere.

But there hadn’t been anyone walking around, had there...? The knights and soldiers must have been thinking the same thing, because they immediately went on the alert.

When I looked at the man suspiciously, our eyes met.

“...I’VE FOUND YOUUUUUUU!” he screeched, as his face morphed into a terrifying smile.

Lord Glen quickly stood up from where he was sitting and moved between the man and I, blocking me from view.

“Ahh... Our Lady, the Proxy! I’ve found the girl that You said You would never forgive! If I get rid of the girl, Your wish will come true! It will, won’t it?!”

Babbling nonsense, the man slammed something onto the ground. Whatever it was split, spitting out smoke.

“Ahh, with this, She will look at me! I don’t care what might happen, as long as She opens Her heart to me! Guhahahahah!!”

«Do not speak of the Proxy like that!» screamed Ele as the man cackled, returning to his Spirit form. His silver hair, long enough to brush the ground, was puffed out, and I could tell how angry he was.

“...Could you be the Spirit who betrayed Her?”

Ele's eyes widened. "I did not betray her!"

"Yes, silver hair, silver eyes! Long hair, just as Her Lady the Proxy's attendant said! I'll have you and the girl disappear!" He screamed again, and the smoke cleared, leaving lots of huge scorpions around us.

I froze, eyes wide open in shock.

"What are monsters doing at the rest stop~!" Miss Micah yelled.

The soldiers and knights all drew their swords, getting ready to fight.

"Those are Sand Scorpions—they're weak to water. They've got venom in their tails, but the rest of them is apparently delicious," Lord Glen said, using his [Appraisal] Skill to tell us the monster's traits. I thought I saw the soldier's eyes flash when Lord Glen had called them 'delicious.'

"Now! Go, my scorpions!"

At the man's command, the Sand Scorpions came at us, hissing.

"Come, thunder!" Spirit Ele screamed, raining bolts down onto the scorpions. Thanks to that, their movements slowed. That was when the knights and soldiers started attacking.

"...*Barrier*." A scorpion had slipped away from the rest to charge at me, and Lord Glen stopped it with magic.

Next, Miss Micah screamed, pulling cooking knives from her Item Box, "I'm gonna cook you up good!" She started chopping up the scorpions.

More Sand Scorpions appeared and charged at us from the opposite direction, and Lord Glen got them with magic, too. "...*Water Bullet*," he cast, summoning small orbs of water to shoot through them.

Each one that fell was then butchered by Miss Micah, while the soldiers quickly set up a wood stove for cooking. The chef pulled a large cauldron from her Item Box, starting to boil the scorpion meat.



A little bit away, the knights had apprehended the man who summoned them, slapping a Mana Sealing Bracelet on his wrist.

“Now that I’m getting a good look at him, that guy is the very same fake fortune teller that tricked Lord Bearsley~” called out Miss Micah, still stirring her cauldron.

Lord Glen’s gaze moved to above the fake fortune teller’s head as he murmured, “Seems like it. Class: Swindler/Worshiper of the Proxy, Driven by Envy. Has a blessing called ‘Ash of the Spirit Tree of Origin.’ Everything matches what Royz told me.”

“What...?! You have Sage-level [Appraisal] too?!” The fake fortune teller’s eyes widened at Lord Glen’s words.

“Ash of the Spirit Tree of Origin’s effect is gaining the ability to teleport and transfer, and protection from the effects of the miasma. But he can’t use any of that now that his mana has been sealed.”

You could just hear the fake fortune teller’s teeth grinding as he listened.

While everyone was discussing what to do with the man, we all heard a loud sound from the sky. Looking up, there was a huge black snake-like thing flying up above.

“It’s Lord Royz~ He’s just a lot bigger than usual,” Miss Micah explained.

The Emperor was a few times larger than he’d been when he carried us in a carriage. When he noticed us, he slowly flew down. He shrunk as he descended, and changed to humanoid form upon landing.

“I rushed out when Rene told me somethin’ was up.”

I nodded at him, and then my bracelet suddenly started shaking before a red bird came flying out.

«Lady Chelsea, are you alright?» Rene asked, spreading her wings and enveloping me with them.

“Why are you here?”

«The Spirits in charge of your storage room told me that you were in danger.»

I looked down at my bracelet to see that it was glimmering. “It looked like you came out of my bracelet...”

«A Great Spirit like me can do that if we get serious. But it seems we weren’t needed,» she muttered, looking around.

While she and I were talking, Lord Royz was getting a detailed report from the soldiers on what happened. His brow furrowed and head tilted a few times as he listened. Once he’d heard everything, he looked over at the fake fortune teller.

“Eek!” The man shrieked, unable to handle the dragonman’s gaze.

“We should hear the deeds straight from the horse’s mouth. Micah, do it.”

“Oh, I *gue-ess*~”

Leaving the stirring to a nearby soldier, Miss Micah moved in front of the fake fortune teller. The man looked relieved when Lord Royz stepped back.

“Micah will now begin her [Interrogation]. Please answer in detail,” the foxwoman said in a very different tone than usual, staring straight at the fake fortune teller. “Why did you attack us?”

“Because the pink-haired girl is with you,” the man said before looking shocked. “W-Why did I...?” he muttered quietly.

“Why did you want to attack her?”

“Her Lady the Proxy, who we worship, saw her in a magic mirror and whispered ‘Unforgivable,’ so I sought to kill the girl.” The man started shaking.

Lord Royz gave a devilishly bold grin, explaining, “Hahaha... Micah’s got a Sage-level [Interrogation] Skill! When she uses it, the subject *has* to answer her questions. Hard to take, isn’t it?”

While he cackled, Miss Micah continued asking questions.

“Where is the Proxy?”

“She lives in a large manor at the center of the Demonic Forest with her male attendant and those who worship her.”

“Did she tell you to kill the girl?”

“No...”

“Then why did you try?”

“I thought that if I erased the girl She said She couldn’t forgive, the Proxy would become closer to me than Her attendant. That maybe...she would love me,” the fake fortune teller said, before bursting into tears. “Please, stop... Don’t expose my heart anymore!”

Lord Royz shook his head. Miss Micah heaved a big sigh before continuing her questioning.

“How did you get the Sand Scorpions?”

“The Proxy’s attendant gave them to me. I don’t know where he got them.”

“And how did you tame them?”

“By giving them their favorite food.”

“I end my [Interrogation] here,” Miss Micah said, nearly fainting immediately after.

Lord Royz caught her. “Out of mana, huh. Good job, Micah.”

“I’m not...completely out~” she replied weakly, back to her usual tone.

“Looks like [Interrogation] takes a lot of mana to use,” muttered Lord Glen, looking as if he had mixed feelings on it.

“I can get him to tell me the rest back at the castle.”

Though we still had questions, Lord Royz carried the man off to the imperial castle.

+ + +

That night, I thought about what had happened earlier today in my bed at the inn. While I was rolling around trying to sleep, Miss Micah whispered to me from the other bed, “Can you not sleep~?”

“...I’m sorry for waking you.”

“Oh, it’s fine~ Let’s have a bit of a chat, then,” she said, picking up her pillow and moving over to my bed. I’d never slept with anyone before, so I was surprised. “Lemme just wiggle in here~ We’ve gotta talk quietly, since it’s late. My bed is so far away, it’s better to talk like this~”

I nodded. She was right.

“So, what are you worrying about~?” she whispered, facing upwards.

I turned to do the same, and told her what I was thinking. “Back when the fake fortune teller attacked us with monsters, I didn’t do anything. I was just protected...”

Miss Micah nodded, urging me to continue.

“I was upset with myself for not being useful... You were amazing, fighting like that.”

“Oh, I wasn’t ‘fighting.’ Sand Scorpions are edible and delicious, so I just used my [Cooking] Skill to prepare them~”

Now that I thought back to it, she’d looked like she was butchering them more than anything.

“It’s not useful at all if you can’t eat the monster you’re battling. But once the fight is over, I cook something to cheer everyone up~ People behind-the-scenes are important too, you know~?”

I’ve never thought of anyone working behind-the-scenes...

“Is there something even I could do...?” I asked.

“Yep~!” she said, turning to look at me. “You can do anything with that Skill of yours~”

“Huh? With [Seed Creation]?”

“For example~ You could make a seed that creates a barrier only while it’s blooming~”

“That’s true... Since I can make anything I wish for...”

“Other than that, you could make one that flashes when you drop it on the ground, to blind your attacker~”

I turned on my side to look back at her. After that, we chatted for a while about possible seeds. With a single thought, I could make a seed that produces water, or turns into a cup, or even makes a bed. I really could make just about anything.



“We can talk to everyone and think up a blueprint in the morning once we get up~” Miss Micah said, before turning to look up again. “I’ve got a question for you though, Chelsea~”

“Yes?”

“Have you ever met the Proxy~?”

“Never,” I responded immediately.

“Hmmm...” she groaned. “It’s weird how she ‘can’t forgive’ you when she’s never met you before~”

“I really can’t think of why...”

“It’s really bothering me~ Enough that I wanna meet her and ask her directly~!”

In the end, we both fell asleep before we knew it, still not understanding anything about the Proxy.

9. Welcome Home

Three days later, we stood at the border checkpoint. It was there that we said goodbye to the soldiers sent to guard us.

“Our Empire will be back to its rich self in no time. Please, come back to visit again!” they said as we separated, heading back.

“Please show proof of your status,” the knight on the Chronowize side asked us.

Miss Micah pulled out the stone necklace with Lord Royz’s emblem, and the knight nodded, being used to seeing it. Next, I presented the brooch showing I was part of Margrave Sargent’s family, and he bowed respectfully. Lastly, Lord Glen flashed him something on the inside of his coat, and the man looked absolutely shocked. After that, the four knights that had been with us showed their identification, and we were all let through.

“Why was the knight so surprised?” I asked Lord Glen in the carriage, only to get a bitter smile back.

“I was told I had to bring ‘Proof of my Royalty’ since we were going to a foreign country... I could’ve just got through with my Appraiser license...”

So that was what was under his coat... I wanted to know what it was, but it probably wasn’t a good idea to ask to see under his clothes, so I stayed quiet.

Once we got through the border crossing, we headed straight for the Margrave’s manor, and stopped in front of the entrance. Looking out the window, I saw that everyone who worked there was lined up outside.

First, Miss Micah got out, followed by Lord Glen. I was the last, and managed to nearly fall out before he caught me.

“Thank you,” I said in a rush, while he looked above my head.

“You’re not hurt, but it seems you’re tired from all the traveling. Let’s stay here and rest for a few days.”

Apparently, he’d used his [Appraisal] Skill to make sure I wasn’t injured.

“Okay.” I didn’t feel that tired, but I nodded anyway.

Just like when we first arrived, my adoptive father said something to Lord Glen, and they headed inside the manor. As I watched them go, my adoptive mother stood right in front of me.

“Welcome home, Chelsea.”

“I’m home, Mother.”

She gave me a huge smile and a gentle hug. I felt like I should treasure her warmth.

“You must be exhausted from your trip. Have a good rest, alright? But who might this be?” Mother loosened her arms, looking towards Miss Micah.

“That’s Miss Micah, my new personal chef.”

“I’m Micah~ Leave all of Chelsea’s cooking to me from now on~!” she beamed while proudly puffing out her chest.

My adoptive mother tilted her head a bit, looking towards one of the people lined up to greet us. “She’s saying to leave it to her, but... How do you feel about that, Head Chef?”

I followed her gaze to an older man wearing a white chef’s coat and hat, who was staring at Miss Micah expressionlessly.

“No.” The Head Chef shook his head. “I’ll have to see her cooking skill first...”

“That’s true... I’d like for her to show how good she is. Let’s have a cooking competition for supper! Micah, was it? Will that be alright with you?”

“Of course~! I’ll make something delicious~!” Miss Micah replied, nearly jumping with joy. Her tail was wagging back and forth. Mother smiled softly seeing how happy she was.

After that, we headed inside the manor, and I went to my room to rest. Lord Glen had gone to talk with my adoptive father in the parlor, while Miss Micah headed to the kitchen to prepare for dinner.

Isn’t it weird how I’m the only one resting? I thought. Mumbling to myself, I said, “I wonder if there’s anything I could do...”

Hearing me, kitten-form Ele thumped his tail on the sofa he was laying on. «What about making seeds and storing them?»

“What kind of seeds?”

«Hmm... You never know when you may go hungry, so you could make some pumpkin seeds to ensure you always have food. And it may also be good to make some Blue or Sky Lily seeds beforehand, in case the miasma ever appears,» Ele replied, tilting his head as he thought. «You also have your own personal garden at the citadel, do you not? You could also make seeds to plant there. And since we do not know what could happen from now on, perhaps you should make Elixir Seeds as well.»

As he spoke, all the seeds he mentioned popped up in my head.

“That’s a good idea. I’ll make a bunch of seeds then.” Tilting my head up to think of what to make, the first one to come to mind was... “I’ll make an Elixir Seed — [Seed Creation].”

With a light pop, a round orange seed that would fit in the palms of both my hands appeared. *If anyone in my family ever gets sick, it’d be*

best for me to have one on hand to give them as soon as possible.

«You should use your bracelet to put the seeds you create in your Spirit World storage.»

I nodded and mentally asked for them to take the seed. As I did, it vanished. My bracelet sparkled too, so it seemed that it had reached my Spirit storage room.

“Next I’ll make a coconut palm seed — [Seed Creation].”

As soon as it popped into existence, I willed it to my storage, and it disappeared.

After that, I made pumpkin seeds, Blue and Sky Lily seeds, vegetable seeds like potatoes and carrots, flower seeds like rose, pansy, and anemones, and had the Spirits store all of them. Every time I did, the bracelet glittered, so the Spirits in charge of my storage might have been happy.

Thinking that they were just made me want to make and send even more. But since I didn’t want to faint from using all my mana creating too many either, I stopped right at twenty.

+ + +

A while after I finished making seeds, Brother Saix and Brother Felix came by my room.

“We’re here to get you, as it’s nearly time for dinner,” Brother Saix said, giving me a big smile. As we headed to the larger dining room, he moved over to my right, saying, “Let’s hold hands so you don’t fall.”

Before I could answer, he’d already taken my hand in his.

“That’s not fair, Sai!” Brother Felix cried, quickly walking to my left side and taking my hand. “You won’t be able to fall if we’re holding *both* of your hands.”

I didn’t really get it, but we’d already started walking again.

“I heard that tonight’s dinner is gonna be a competition between the Head Chef and the chef you brought, Chelsea.”

“Yes! She’s a foxwoman named Miss Micah, and she’s a really great chef!”

“I guess I’ll look forward to it, then,” said Brother Saix, and I nodded back.

Once we got to the dining room, everyone else was already there. Just like before, I sat between my grandparents. Then, the food was brought in.

The fish sauté, little meat pies, and salads were made by all of the chefs together, but the two plates of risotto that came in last were made by Miss Micah and the Head Chef. One had a red rim, while the other had a blue one, but both were full of mushrooms.

“Tonight, we’re having a cooking competition to test the skills of

Chelsea's personal chef, Miss Micah, against our head chef," announced Mother. "There are two plates of risotto, so once you're done eating, we'll ask which one everyone liked best."

My grandmother brought her hands together happily, a smile across her face—while my father and grandfather forced smiles, as if they were thinking, "*Not this again...*"

After saying my prayers, I ate my salad, then continued to the fish sauté and little meat pie. Lastly, I had the two risotto in order to compare them.

Both had chicken and mushrooms, but the red-rimmed plate tasted like what I was used to. The blue-rimmed one, on the other hand, tasted completely different. There was something peculiar about the flavor, just like the 'Chinese Rice Porridge' that Miss Micah made before. I took another bite from the red-rimmed plate, but now the taste felt like it lacked the same impact.

The blue-rimmed risotto is definitely yummiier. I like it. I looked up as I thought that, and locked eyes with Mother.

"Okay, everyone raise your hands for whichever one you prefer. First, our red-rimmed risotto."

Grandfather raised his hand, but no one else did.

"Next, the blue-rimmed risotto."

Everyone, *including* Grandfather, raised their hands.

Is it okay to raise your hand for both? I looked over to him, and he gave me a grin back.

"Now, let's call for the chef who prepared the blue-rimmed risotto." A maid headed towards the kitchen at Mother's command.

"I liked both, so I raised my hand for both," he explained.

"You're supposed to only raise your hand for *one* of them. Don't follow Grandfather's example, okay?"

"Teaching Chelsea weird ideas... Really, Grandfather..."

Both of my elder brothers chided him in response. I looked over to Lord Glen and he gave me a bit of a forced smile, so they must have been right.

Just as I was thinking that, the maid came back with Miss Micah. The head chef was behind them, wringing his hat in his hands.

"So the blue-rimmed plate was yours, Micah?" Mother asked, getting a nod back from the foxwoman. "We're now sure of her skills, so she'll be in charge of Chelsea's meals from now on. Is that alright, Chef?"

"Yes..." The head chef nodded meekly, before bowing to Miss Micah. "I apologize for doubting your abilities."

"Oh, it's fine~ It's an important thing to do!" Her tail was swaying back and forth.

The head chef straightened before bowing again. "Please, teach

me how to make your risotto. I'd like to know the difference that made everyone choose it."

Seemingly surprised by the request, Miss Micah's tail puffed up. "I'm a beastman, you know~? Is that still okay...?"

"Cooking has nothing to do with race. I want to make delicious food."

"Okay~!" she said, smiling happily, tail wagging.

+ + +

After dinner, I was shuffled off for a bath and told to go to bed early, since I must have been exhausted. After the maids helped me bathe, and I got changed, I realized how heavy and sluggish I felt. I tried heading for my bed in a daze, but my legs gave out before I could make it, and I plopped down on the floor.

A maid rushed to steady me, helping me to the bed. "Miss, you're burning up!" she cried, signaling for the other maids to move.

As I watched them blankly, Mother showed up. She looked upset as she touched my forehead, grimacing. "Your fever is high..." she said, giving me a pat on the head and putting a damp cloth on my forehead.

That feels nice and cool...

A bit later, my adoptive father and Lord Glen came to see me.

Lord Glen stared at the spot above my head. "My [Appraise] Skill says it's from exhaustion. [Cure] can't heal things like this."

He looked like he was in more pain than I was, standing beside my bed. *I have to tell him I'm okay...* But I was too tired to speak, and before I knew it, I had lost consciousness.

When I woke up the next morning, my fever hadn't gone down. I still felt so sluggish that I didn't want to eat anything. When I told that to the maids, Miss Micah appeared a while later with some Chinese rice porridge.

"At least have a bite~ If you don't eat, your stamina will decrease, and it'll take longer for you to get better~"

That wouldn't be good. I don't want to cause any more trouble for Lord Glen. The thought made me eat a single bite, and before I knew it, I'd eaten the whole thing.

"Good girl~! It's full of nutrients, so you should get better in no time~!" she said, patting my head before leaving.

The day after that, I still felt heavy, but my fever was down. *I need to get better quickly, so we can get back to the Research Institute...!*

When Lord Glen came to my room to check on me, I asked about our plans, "When are we going back to the capital?"

"After you get a bit more rest," he told me, not specifying a date. *Oh no, what if we've been so delayed he can't even tell me...? I*

withered, feeling terrible.

Lord Glen gave me a worried smile and patted me on the head. "We'd already planned to spend a few days here, and I've sent word to the capital, so don't worry and focus on getting some rest. I want you to feel better as soon as possible, but don't force yourself."

"Okay..." His kind words made me smile.

A few days after that... I got laid up with another fever.

"My [Appraisal] says it's a mana fever this time," Lord Glen said, looking upset again after he appeared with Mother.

Why is he always making that face? Despite thinking it odd, I felt too heavy to speak.

"A mana fever... The kind that young children get that lasts for about a week and makes them drowsy?"

He nodded. "They happen when the balance between your body and mana pool breaks down. [Cure] can't heal this one either."

"Maybe it's because she's finally getting proper nutrients..."

"I think so."

Getting sick at age twelve from something that usually happens to little kids... I felt bad—it was as if my body was telling me it was too young.

Because of my mana fever, I spent the rest of the day dozing off. At one point when I was dimly conscious, I heard my adoptive father and Lord Glen talking.

"...Chelsea should stay here at the manor for a while to recover."

"You're right. Even if her fever broke, a carriage ride would probably be too hard on her right now. She needs to rest."

"Your Highness, please, go ahead and return to the palace first."

Lord Glen is going to go back first?

"...But I made a promise to Chelsea."

"Then you can forget that promise. Her family will protect her."

Would he forgo our promise?

"I can't just forget it without getting her permission first..." Lord Glen said, dropping his tone.

"Your Highness, as I told you before, you will eventually come to a point where you cannot protect Chelsea anymore. Please, give her back to her family before then."

Before I realized it, I was in tears, begging, "...No... Don't leave me..."

"I'm not leaving you. Everything's okay," he murmured, softly patting me on the head.

His words relaxed me, and soon after, I'd fallen back into a deep sleep.



10. Recuperation

About a week after my mana fever first appeared, it had broken, and my drowsiness had faded as well. Just when I'd thought we could finally leave for the capital, the Sargent Margraviate's personal healer stopped me.

"Mana fevers occur when your mana pool, which is where your mana collects, and your body fall out of balance. When this happens, your body tends to rush to grow and accommodate your larger mana pool. This would mean that even if you were to leave for the capital as you are now, you would just fall sick again on the way. You should wait anywhere from a month to six months to see how you feel."

A month to half a year...?! There was no way I could make Lord Glen wait that long for me. He had matters to attend as a royal, as a duke, and as an appraiser. Even just from what I could imagine, he should be really busy... He should go back before I do... I decided to tell him that.

Lord Glen visited me every day. Today, he'd come in the morning, immediately using his [Appraisal] Skill to check how I was doing.

"Looks like your mana fever is gone," he said, patting me on the head.

"The healer said that I'm going to have a growth spurt."

He nodded. "Actually, I had one when I was little, too... It was tough."

"...He also said that we'll need to see how things go for a month...maybe up to six months."

"Oh yeah, it took around that long, huh?"

He was still giving me his usual soft smile. If I was going to say it, it would have to be now.

"Um... Lord Glen."

He tilted his head a bit.

"...Please go back first."

When I said it straight like that, his eyes widened, and he looked shocked. In a tone harsher than usual, he said, "Is someone telling you to say that?"

I shook my head. "No, I'm saying it because I've been thinking about it."

I could remember Father telling Lord Glen to return first back when I was barely conscious. I would be lying if I said that hadn't

sparked the thought, but no one was making me say it.

He looked at me silently with a sour look on his face.

"It's been ten days already since we first arrived. A month to six months is way too long," I said decisively.

After giving me a big sigh, he mumbled, "...I don't want to leave you."

He sounded like a child, frowning. I was surprised to see a side of him I'd never seen before.

"But there's no way I could be selfish like that," he continued, smiling wryly. "I'll go back first. But I'm gonna come back for you once you're better."

The following morning, Lord Glen and the guardian knights left for the capital.

+ + +

I'd been sighing a lot since Lord Glen went home.

Even while I ate the food Miss Micah made for me, I would think things like how it was his favorite too, and sigh to myself... When I walked around the manor for some exercise, I'd stop in front of the guest room he'd stayed in, remember how we studied, and how we made up our blueprint, and sigh again... I thought about when we met, when we had our secret tea party, and when we held hands—that made me sigh, too.

Why was I sighing so much when I thought of him? Since I couldn't figure it out on my own, I asked Mother and Miss Micah for advice.

"I just can't think of a reason for it. Do you two have any ideas?"

When I told them everything, Mother gave me a satisfied smile, while Miss Micah's eyes sparkled as she wagged her tail.

"Chelsea, dear, you have absolutely no clue why it's happening?"

"No, I don't," I replied, shaking my head.

"In your case, it might be a bit hard for you to figure it out on your own, since you're lacking in fundamental knowledge..."

"It might be better to tell her straight out~"

"You're right. Let's make it crystal clear."

They were looking at each other and nodding. It seemed that they'd gotten friendlier at some point.

"Chelsea."

"Yes?"

"You're in love with His Highness," Mother said.

I blinked a few times. *Love...*? I thought. The "Fairy Story" book I read before said that's when you think of someone as precious, and feel all sorts of emotions for them. *Now that I think about it, I might have felt those things when I thought about Lord Glen.*

“You want to see him as soon as you can, don’t you?”

I nodded. That was when I finally awakened to the fact that I loved him. The moment I did, my face went red. *Did what I said before tell them just how much I love him?!* Once I realized, I couldn’t bear the embarrassment.

“Fufu... You look positively adorable.”

“Girls become beautiful when they’re in love~”

“I’m going to support your romance all the way,” Mother said. “We should send him a formal engagement proposal so you can become his fiancée.”

I froze at her suggestion. I’d realized I was in love, but I hadn’t thought enough to get engaged.

“Hm? What’s wrong?” she asked, looking at me curiously.

“I-It wouldn’t be appropriate for a child like me to be his fiancée,” I said, tears welling up.

Before I’d been adopted into the Sargent family... Back when I’d lived in the barony, I’d barely been fed, so I was only about as tall as an eight-year-old, despite being twelve. Lord Glen always treated me like a kid, too, carrying me and patting my head. A proposal from me would only end up troubling him...

Just as I felt that my future was bleak, Mother spoke up. “Our healer told you you’ll be going through a growth spurt after your mana fever, didn’t he? You’ll be taller in no time.”

Well, they *did* say I would go through a growth spurt. So that meant I’d get taller! If I was taller, he might not think of me as a child as much anymore...! Seeing the light at the end of the tunnel, I clutched my hands together as if I was going to pray.

“We’ll have to start that plan of ours.”

“We’ll go all in~!”

What did they mean by “plan”? As I looked at both of them in confusion, they both gave me comforting smiles.

“Our plan is to have everyone in the manor help make you into a wonderful lady!”

I gave a firm nod. Back at the barony, I was never allowed to study properly, and what I’d learned back at the Research Institute was all superficial. If it was at all possible, I would love to become a proper lady.

“But we’ve gotta edit the plan a bit~ We’ll make you into a lady fit for His Highness~!”

“Yes, that’s a better idea!” Mother clapped happily at Miss Micah’s suggestion. “So, Chelsea. While you’re here, we’ll have you study to become a lady fit for him!”

“O-Okay. Please do.”

“Since I want to teach you proper gestures, speech, and conduct,

we'll have to postpone your return to the capital for about half a year."

I just realized how badly I wanted to see Lord Glen, and they're going to make me wait the full six months before going back?! I blanked out from the shock, and Mother smiled at me.

"Sometimes absence makes the heart grow fonder," she said, telling me about how she and Father had exchanged letters between when they were first engaged and when they married. She had originally lived in the capital, so they'd been separated until the wedding. "Sometimes, you can write things in letters that you couldn't say out loud."

She wouldn't tell me what she'd written, but the happy smile on her face told me that she had wonderful memories of it, whatever it was.

"How about you write letters, too?"

"Okay," I said, nodding in agreement. I'd never thought I'd ever be able to write Lord Glen any letters, so I was excited! "I'll do my best!" I clenched my fist as I announced it, and both of the older women grinned.

The next day, I told Ele about the letters.

«Then I will deliver it for you. I may even deign to bring back a reply.»

I didn't let him know that acting self-important in his tiny kitten form was just cute. Apparently, he could move between my bracelet and other Spirit Trees, just like Rene.

«I won't be able to protect you while I am away, but Glen put up a barrier around this manor before he left. As long as you stay here, you should be safe.»

I was so happy to hear that he was protecting me like that.

«If it makes my Mistress that happy, I could do it once in a while.»

"Thank you!" After saying my thanks, I immediately went to write my letter, but Ele stopped me.

«It takes ten days to travel from here to the capital. Glen would not be there yet. I wouldn't be able to deliver it.»

I didn't think of that... I went quiet, embarrassed as my face got hotter and hotter. I was probably bright red.

«They say love is blind... Alas.»

In an attempt to hide my shame, I rubbed Ele's belly as much as possible.

Interlude 5: Glen

Once we'd returned to the capital from the Sargent Margraviate, I retired to my room. There, Ele showed up in kitten form. I quickly sent the servants away to speak to him.

"What are you doing here?"

«Making Lady Chelsea happy,» he replied, throwing the letter he'd been holding under his leg.

Catching it, I checked who the sender was, and saw "Chelsea" written in clumsy handwriting. *Did something happen?* I thought.

I felt more worried than happy, and once I ripped the letter open, I saw that it was a request for me to wait half a year before I went back for her. Apparently, aside from health reasons, she wanted to get some lady training in as well.

Back at the Eucharis Barony, she hadn't been able to do any proper studying. At the Royal Research Institute, we'd only really done any during breaks in her Skill research and while we had our mana pool-increasing tea parties. This was a good opportunity for her.

«Will you be writing a reply?»

"Of course I will..."

«I've promised Lady Chelsea that I'll return with any replies once you finish.»

"Is it okay if I take a few days?"

«I'll be returning immediately if the barrier you put up is a weak one. But it isn't, correct?»

"No. I made it even stronger than the one around the Origin Spirit Tree."

«Hah... You have a soft spot for her.»

I looked away when he said that, not answering.

By the next morning, I had finished up my reply. In it, I told her I'd definitely come to meet her in half a year. I thought about telling her how my journey home had been, but I stopped because it wasn't terribly interesting.

+ + +

The same night I'd arrived home, I went to my brother, the king's office. Once I was inside, I had him send the servants away.

"I've just returned," I reported, and he gestured for me to sit on the sofa.

"I'm glad you're safe. But isn't there something else you want to say?" he asked, sitting across the low table from me, looking amused.

"Chelsea, the research fellow, has come down with a mana fever, so she'll be recuperating in her family's territory for half of a year."

"Of course; a growing child would need time to recuperate after a mana fever." Since we were far apart in age, he must have remembered what had happened back when I'd gotten one. "We'll retain her research fellow position here, and treat her recuperation as temporary leave."

I was relieved to hear that he wasn't going to end her duties.

"Anything else?"

Taking a deep breath, I told him, "In half a year, I'm returning to the Sargent Margraviate to bring her back."

"Not a request, but a statement, huh."

I nodded.

"Sending someone to escort her back is fine. But is there some reason a royal like you should go personally?" He was tilting his head curiously, but he had a grin plastered on his face.

If Chelsea was going to try to change, I would, too. If I couldn't say it here, though, I wouldn't be able to tell her.

I looked straight at my brother. "I'm going to propose marriage to her."

"It would be a terrible loss if we lost a Skill as useful as hers. If she was to marry another noble, there would probably be some unnecessary conflicts," he said, playing dumb.

I took another deep breath. "I don't want to marry her politically. I want to marry her because I want *her*," I declared, only for my brother to burst out laughing.

"You've finally said it! Took you long enough!" Once he finished laughing, he tilted his head questioningly. "The girl looks very young, does she not? Would that mean that you're...a 'lolicon'?"

The word he'd learned from the Reincarnator Dictionary passed down through the royal family pierced my heart. I had always worried about that. Royz had said that beastmen didn't judge based on outward age or size, since they can change them whenever they want. Back then, I'd imagined Chelsea as an adult, and as an old woman. But I realized that my feelings for her didn't change.

...Which meant I didn't fall in love with her appearance. I mean, she was really beat up the first time I met her... It's more accurate to say that I fell in love with her heart.

"Ahhh, uh... I get it. You don't have to go on about your love."

Damn, did I say that all out loud?

"I understand you from my standpoint as your older brother," he said, before switching to his attitude to that of a ruler. "But as King, I

will have Chelsea, adopted daughter of the Margrave Sargent, engaged to Royal Prince Glenarnold Snowflake.”

“What?!”

My brother... No, the King was going to have us engaged by royal decree. Which meant that it would look like a political marriage.

“We can’t have that girl running loose. You understand, don’t you?”

Chelsea’s Skill allowed her to create any seed she wished for. She could make a seed to charm and rule the world, or make one that would spout out poison and destroy it.

“If you hadn’t wanted to marry her, I was going to have her engaged to the crown prince.”

“He’s only three years old!” I protested.

“And if I couldn’t, I’d thought about having her confined in a tower, or having her mana sealed.”

“Chelsea hasn’t done anything wrong yet. In fact, she’s working to make the kingdom flourish... No, to bring world peace.”

“Then you’ll just have to protect her as her fiancé, won’t you?” my brother said, laughing.

“Then give me a magic tool from the treasury to protect her.”

“Alright. Take whatever you want.”

I’d meant for it to be an impossible request as revenge, but he immediately agreed. Earlier, I’d found a ring-shaped magic tool in the treasury that would automatically cast defensive magic in the case that the wearer was attacked. Once we were engaged, she might get into conflicts with other women, and I needed that ring to nip them in the bud before they started.

“Do your best to stop her from thinking it’s political,” he said, chasing me out of the room.

Epilogue

From then on, I did my best to eat and sleep properly, and studied a lot. Miss Micah made me lots of food full of ingredients good for the body, and thanks to that, I got a bunch taller. Unfortunately, though, I was still a bit shorter than the average twelve-year-old.

Growing taller meant growing pains, and there were days I couldn't even move. Those days, I'd have chats together with my Mother and Grandmother. They'd use a more ladylike tone than they usually did, which led to me using one more naturally, too. Other than that, I was happy to have learned of a new side of Lord Glen thanks to the half-year that we exchanged letters. I just kept wanting to see him more and more... Honestly, it was difficult.

Finally, after six months had passed, the Royal Research Academy was sending an escort to bring me back. My latest letter from Lord Glen even said that he'd be coming with them. I was so excited to see him that I could barely sleep the night before—my impatience was palpable. I knew they weren't due to arrive until around sunset, but I couldn't stay still. I kept pacing back and forth from the entrance hall to my room while the maids watched me warmly.

"Chelsea, why don't you try calming down a little?"

"Alright. I'm sorry, Mother."

After being scolded, I decided to wait in my room quietly.

"Milady, the carriage will be arriving soon."

Nodding to the maid who came to report, I quickly walked to the entrance. After checking to make sure my hair and clothes weren't messed up, I straightened myself up and went outside.

It seemed that the carriage had just arrived. I saw Lord Glen step out slowly—his dark blue hair like the night, and lighter blue eyes that seemed to suck you in. No matter how many times I saw him, he was always as beautiful as the angels from fairy tales.

While I stood there enchanted, our eyes met. I subconsciously averted my gaze, looking down. I was so happy to finally see him again, but so embarrassed at the same time... I didn't know what to do. My face felt hot—I was definitely blushing bright red.

As I hid my face behind my hands, I could feel someone approach me.

"You're Chelsea, aren't you?"

"Yes." I nodded immediately, hearing his gentle voice.

“You’re so tall and ladylike now. I won’t be able to pat your head easily anymore,” he said, kneeling in front of me. Since I was facing down, our eyes met again.

He wasn’t smiling his usual gentle smile. Instead, he was staring at me with a stern expression. I couldn’t look away, having never seen him like that before. We looked at each other for a while before his expression softened, eyebrows drooping and looking troubled.

“I don’t think I’m gonna be able to hold back...” he muttered, giving me another hard look as he pulled a small box from his Item Box. Then, opening it up, he showed me what was inside. “Would you accept this, so I can protect you openly from now on?”

Inside the box was a ring with a stone the same color as Lord Glen’s eyes. One of the things I had learned over this half-year was that a man giving an unwed lady a ring meant they did so with the intent of marriage, and that they’d like to become engaged. I thought I must be seeing things, so I blinked a bunch of times, but the ring didn’t disappear.

“Maybe I have to be a bit more straightforward...” he murmured, since I hadn’t responded. He took a deep breath. “You’re precious to me. Please, become my fiancée.”

My face went bright red the moment the words left his mouth. There was no way to misunderstand after he said that.

“...Yes,” I replied quietly, nodding.

His stern expression morphed into a happy one. He took the ring out of the box and slipped it onto my right ring finger. It shrunk down to fit my finger exactly with a little sound. Since the same thing had happened when I got my Spirit Tree bracelet, it wasn’t that surprising this time.

“This is an engagement ring, but it’s also a magic tool that will immediately deploy defensive magic if you’re threatened. I put it on your right ring finger, since it doesn’t come off easily. I want to keep your left one open for a wedding ring, after all,” Lord Glen explained, looking at it.

Putting it on my right hand because he’s already thinking of when we marry... The ring was a sign that wherever I went, he would be protecting me. I was so happy; my chest felt as if it would burst. Standing back up, he took my hand. I looked up at him as he did and saw a dreamy smile on his face, unlike his usual look. Even then, it was still angelically beautiful and enchanting.

“Really...”

I turned to see who spoke, only to see Father standing there, looking cranky. *Oh, now that I think about it, we’re standing in front of the entrance... And everyone who works in the manor came out to greet him, which means there’s tons of people here...*

When I realized I'd accepted Lord Glen's proposal in front of so many people, my face started burning again.

"Oh, Chelsea, you're red as a beet!" Mother spoke up from beside Father, a great smile on her face.

But just saying that wasn't going to make it any less red. Even if I wanted to hide my face, Lord Glen was holding one of my hands, so I could only cover my mouth.

In the end, I went back inside, still blushing.

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Lord Glen and I sat on one sofa in the parlor, while Father (looking quite upset) and Mother (looking very happy) sat across from us.

A moment later, Miss Micah came in with a server maid, a smile also on her face. The maid put tea and youkan on the low table in front of us. The youkan was made by Miss Micah, and its sweetness went well with the astringent tea. It was on the way to becoming my second favorite sweet, aside from flan.

After saying my prayers to the earth god, I took a bite of the youkan; the sweetness of the red bean spread through my body. When I looked over to Lord Glen beside me, he looked extremely excited.

"You also like youkan?" I asked, getting a happy nod back.

For a while after that, we talked about what happened during his journey and in the capital over the half-year I was away. It was all so interesting, I got into listening to him talk. Father's grumpiness soon changed to surprise and admiration, as well.

Once the atmosphere had lightened a bit, Lord Glen sat up straight and looked at Father. "Can I get to the real subject now?"

The moment he was asked that, my adoptive father looked upset again, giving a short nod in response.

"Then let me ask properly. Please, allow my engagement to Chelsea."

For nobility, engagements and marriage were also meant to strengthen the bonds between families, so they required the permission of the family head. In the case that they weren't allowed, they would only be seen as "dating," and if they got married anyway without permission, it would be called "eloping."

Dating was ignorable because it wouldn't cause any harm to others. Eloping, on the other hand, would cause huge problems if the next family head was to do it, and be hard on the couple themselves due to having to drop out of the aristocracy. All of this was, of course, taught to me by Mother.

It was important to get proper permission first. I bowed a little bit too, because I also wanted it.

“Permission? Isn’t it already decided?” Father said, pulling an envelope from inside his inner coat pocket and showing us. It was an order from the King himself to have me become Lord Glen’s fiancée.

Engagements ordered by His Majesty were overwhelmingly for political reasons. So did that mean that ours was political too...?

I looked over to Lord Glen, who gave a sad look back. “Would you have given your blessings had it not been a royal decree?”

“Certainly not. With all due respect, Your Highness, allowing her to be your fiancée would be far too dangerous.”

Mother and Grandmother had already told me all about the dangers Father was talking about. Since the first prince was still so young, there was the chance that Lord Glen could be forced to become the next king. Other than that, his position as head of a duchy could lead to scuffles with other ladies.

But even so, I wanted to be with him. Political marriage or not, it didn’t matter to me as long as I could stay with him.

“I’ve promised to protect Chelsea, so I would never let her be in any danger,” he said straight out. I was relieved to see that he was prepared to protect me from whatever may come.

“But what about the situations where you can’t be there... Like between women?” Father countered, not backing down.

“I’ve given her a magical ring should situations such as that arise.”

“This isn’t the time for you to say thoughtless things like that...”

“James, shouldn’t you give up soon?” Mother spoke up.

I nodded, in agreement with her. Though I was happy that my adoptive father was so worried about me, I would like for him to have a bit more trust in us.

“Do you think anyone able to protect her more than His Highness will ever come along?”

“We could just keep her at home,” Father said, pouting.

“So you’d prefer to have her live her life being ridiculed for missing the chance to get married just because of your selfishness?”

Father tensed up hearing that and said nothing in response.

Suffering from gossip due to being Lord Glen’s fiancée, or suffering from gossip due to having missed my chance at marriage... If I’m going to get ridiculed anyway, I’d rather it be with the one I love.

“Then let me ask you again. Would you allow us to marry if it wasn’t by royal decree?”

“...Yes,” Father finally answered, reluctantly.

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And so, despite the fact that it was an order from the king, my engagement to Lord Glen got family approval, and we became officially betrothed.

“I’ve got it in writing, so no one can complain,” he murmured as we took a walk around the manor’s garden before we left.

Who does he think is going to complain? When I looked at him confused, he gave me his usual angelically gentle smile, and lifted a hand before pulling it back. I tilted my head again, and he gave a bitter smile.

“Even if we’re engaged, it’s probably not good to pat a lady on the head, is it...”

“You’ve always thought of me as a child, after all...” I mumbled back, only to get some confused blinks back.

“No, I didn’t think of you as a... Well, maybe I did...” he said before looking away.

Seeing his actions and how he couldn’t lie, I let out a small giggle.

The sound of neighing horses could be heard in the distance. It probably meant it was time to leave now. I was only here for half a year, but the people of the Sargent family were both kind and strict. It made me realize this was how families were supposed to work.

“I’m a bit sad that I won’t be living here anymore,” I whispered.

Lord Glen squeezed our linked hands. “You can take holidays, and we can come back together.”

He’ll be coming with me... I gasped at the thought. His kindness made my chest feel warm.

Side Story

1. Mysterious Fog

About three days after leaving the Sargent manor...

The horses pulling our carriage, which had been driving down the main road, slowly came to a stop. It wasn't very long since we'd left that day, so it was too soon for a break. The fact that we'd stopped meant that something was happening outside.

I looked to Lord Glen in worry, and he softly patted my back. A few moments later, we heard a knock with a predetermined rhythm and number of taps from outside. This was the sign that it was safe.

Just as I sighed in relief, we heard the coachman's voice.

"Please excuse me. I have stopped due to thick fog in our path."

Looking out the coachman's podium window, things went completely white about fifty steps from where we were.

"That's really thick... Let's have a little break, then," Lord Glen commanded. And so we took a rest break.

At typical traveling rest spots, there was usually a cabin nearby so that the coachman and the people riding in the carriage could rest, too. Since we weren't at one, though, we would pitch a tent instead. The coachman couldn't leave the horses, so they would tie them up near the carriage.

Stepping out of the carriage, the guardian knights had already finished pitching the tent.

"Thank you very much," I said, getting the Knight Order's characteristic grin in return.

"The weather's beautiful, but heavy fog is present only around here. There has to be something up," Lord Glen muttered, staring at the fog covering the road, his hand on his chin.

"I feel something weird~" Miss Micah said, standing with her arms crossed.

«Yes, something is strange,» Kitten Ele responded from his spot on my shoulder.

Unfortunately, Miss Micah couldn't hear him in kitten form, but since he was nodding, she seemed to realize he was agreeing.

«I will go check,» he continued. With a gust of wind and the blink of an eye, Kitten Ele changed to his original Spirit form and flew off into the fog.

"What?! The cat turned into a person?!"

“That was no person... He was see-through...”

“I can’t take ghosts. Please, don’t.”

The knights and coachman’s eyes were widened in shock.

“That kitten is actually a Spirit. Make sure you don’t let that slip,” Lord Glen warned, getting nods back from the group.

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While we waited and ate Miss Micah’s specially made soup, Spirit Ele came drifting back out of the fog.

“There’s a large snake monster in the middle of all this. I returned because the fog blocked my vision too much to attack... It is more than ten times longer than the carriage, and the front of it was light green, and overall about this thick,” he told us, making a circle with his arms.

If someone walked into the thick white fog without knowing that there was a monster inside... They might have been eaten in one gulp! Just the thought made me start shaking.

“I know that monster~” Miss Micah piped up, pulling a book titled ‘Monster Encyclopedia’ from her Item Box and flipping through it. “It’s this one,” she said, pointing to a page with a huge snake drawn there.

“Oh! Yes, that was it!” Ele said with a nod the moment he saw it.

“It’s called a Fog Viper, and it makes thick fog, eating any being that wanders inside~ Its favorite food is liquorice, making it slightly sweet and delicious~ Plus, it’s super nutritional~!” she explained, eyes glowing, and a look of excitement on her face.

“We can’t leave it like it is, so let’s defeat it,” Lord Glen said.

All of the knights nodded. “Then let us prepare to enter the fog...” the youngest of them started, only to be interrupted by a shake of the head.

“We wouldn’t be able to see each other in fog that thick. Luckily, we know what the Fog Vipers eat, so we can lure it out with that.”

“Forgive my insolence, but...we have no liquorice root with us. It only grows in the warm regions to the south, so I doubt any nearby towns would have any...” This time, it was the oldest of the knights speaking up, shaking his head.

“That’s where Chronowize’s research fellow comes in,” Lord Glen said, looking over to me.

Liquorice was a plant, so I would be able to make seeds with my Skill. Plus, any seeds I made this way would definitely bud, regardless of region.

“I need to create quick-growing liquorice seeds with my Skill, correct?”

Lord Glen answered with a soft smile and a nod.

“Please give me back my plant encyclopedia,” I whispered to my Spirit Tree bracelet. It popped up before my eyes, so I caught it.

Next, I flipped to the page on liquorice and checked what kind of plant it was. Liquorice was a plant that grew leaves bigger than the palm of your hand. The seeds were brown, and bigger than my thumbnail. The leaves were also very sweet, and in warm regions to the south, it was boiled into syrup.

After memorizing the details from the encyclopedia, I whispered, “I’ll make a liquorice seed that grows faster than normal that will only grow for one generation — [Seed Creation].”

With a pop, a green seed the size of my thumbnail appeared. Since normal liquorice seeds were brown, I knew that it was a similar, but different seed.

Lord Glen immediately used his [Appraisal] Skill on it. “It’s a liquorice seed that’ll grow immediately after being planted, wither in half a day, and not leave any seeds behind.”

I was relieved that I’d made the seed properly.

“I’ll take this,” he said, picking the seed out of my hands and squeezing it lightly. “The knights and I will take care of the rest of it, so make sure not to leave the tent.”

I nodded obediently.

“I’ll go with you~!”

“Then I will stay with Lady Chelsea,” Ele announced, transforming back to his kitten form in another gust of wind and hopping on my shoulder.

“Do your best.” Even though they would be fighting at the edge of the fog where I could still see them, I still wished them well. All of the knights gave me big grins back.

“See you in a bit,” Lord Glen replied, looking happy as he walked towards the fog.



Interlude: Glen

Trying hard to stop grinning like a fool because Chelsea told me to do my best, I walked towards the fog. It had a definite edge, and I stood three steps away from it.

“I’m planting the liquorice here. Our battle will begin as soon as I do, so get ready!”

After telling that to the knights from the Second Order that had come with me from the capital, I dropped the seed to the ground with a plop. It immediately buried itself into the ground and began to sprout. From bud to leaf, it grew even larger, leaves bigger than our heads sprouting thickly.

Between those leaves were white flowers which were even bigger, and a sweet smell started wafting from them. It wasn’t too strong or too sweet, and before even a minute had passed, a huge snake came slithering out of the fog towards them. At that size, it’d be able to eat a human in a single bite. I reflexively gulped.

Taking a closer look, there was fog still pouring from the Fog Viper’s body.

Beside me, Micah the foxwoman stood with her kitchen knives ready, wiping her mouth with her sleeve. *She’s probably wiping the drool off...*

“Simple steak, grind it up into hamburger, stuff it into green peppers, even cabbage rolls would be nice~ Ah... There’s also the shabu-shabu option...”

The food names she was mumbling made me start drooling too. “...Add karaage and gyoza to that too, okay?” I muttered in a tone so low I was worried she wouldn’t hear, but her eyes lit up as she looked over to me.

“Leave it to Micah~ Chelsea loves karaage too, so let’s go with that~!”

While we were chatting about that, the Fog Viper was ignoring us, focusing on chomping down the liquorice plant in front of it. I quickly used my [Appraisal] Skill.

[Fog Viper (Unique): A massive snake monster. Constantly spews fog, eating anything that wanders in. Unique skill: can mix mana draining poison into its fog. Loves liquorice plants.]

Next, I checked the fog itself and saw that the mana draining poison was indeed mixed in.

“Careful! This Fog Viper is unique! The fog has poison in it, so do your best not to touch it!” I yelled, raising a hand.

The knights all charged in at my signal, but the Fog Viper just

used its tail to sweep them away before continuing to eat the liquorice plant. The youngest knight was knocked back into the plant, tearing through a few leaves.

«What are you doing to my precious liquorice?!» the Viper screeched. Since I was a Reincarnator, I could understand any language, so of course I understood what it was screaming about, but... *Just how much does it love liquorice?*

I could feel the tension running through the knights at the monster's cry.

«You're all in the waaaaaaaay!» The Fog Viper screeched again, spewing out more thick fog that made me lose sight of the others.

Dammit...! I need to get rid of this fog or it'll drain all of our mana!
"...Gust of Wind."

I rushed to cast the spell. It was wind magic near useless for attacking, but it pushed the fog up into the sky. After it faded, we could see our surroundings again, and everyone started moving.

"We're having karaage for lunch~!" Micah cheered, bringing down her kitchen knife to slice through the Viper's tail. The sliced tail stopped moving, and she quickly touched it and put it in her Item Box. Now it wouldn't be able to use it to brush us off anymore.

The knights charged in again all at once while I used magic off to the side to make their weapons sharper. The Fog Viper was sliced into round chunks, unable to screech again.

I used my [Appraisal] Skill again.

"Death confirmed," I reported, getting a cheer from the group of knights.

2. Mana Drained

I watched everyone fight from the tent. The Fog Viper had been eating the liquorice right until it was defeated. It really must have loved it. When they'd been covered by the thick fog, my heart was thumping in worry.

After the monster was defeated, Miss Micah wagged her tail as she collected it. *I guess she plans on cooking it, huh?* The fog covering the road started fading. Just as I was relieved that it was all over, Lord Glen and the knights came back to where I was waiting.

"Welcome back."

He gave me a clumsy smile back before collapsing to his knees.

"Lord Glen?!" I ran over to him. He was breathing heavily, facing down.

"The Fog Viper's poison...got me..."

"What kind of poison?!"

If it wasn't an illness, Lord Glen could heal it with his [Cure] Skill. But he wasn't even trying, which meant that it was something he couldn't cure. My seeds might be able to do something, though. Once I knew what kind of poison it was, I could counter it!

"...It's a weird poison that drains your mana," he replied to my question slowly before falling on his back. "We'll all be fine...after resting and having our mana restore a bit..."

The knights around him started falling to the ground. Even Miss Micah collapsed.

I stood there in shock. I'd collapsed twice from using my Skill too much and running out of mana. This made me realize how the people around me felt, even after I told them I was alright.

«We cannot leave them like this,» Ele said as I fluttered around with worry.

Now that I thought of it, Ele had gone into the fog once to see what was inside. Was he alright?

"Are you okay, Ele?"

He gave me as arrogant a smile as a kitten could, replying, «As long as we are in this world, Spirits cannot be harmed.»

Still while in his kitten form, he used something not magic, but unique to Spirits to carry everyone inside the tent.

+ + +

«Their mana will be fully restored after sleeping through the night.»

"Then we just have to let them sleep," I replied, only for him to

shake his head.

«That would leave you without protection, Lady Chelsea. Furthermore, I cannot have you stay here when there is neither food nor a place to sleep.»

He was right. Ele and I couldn't do anything alone. Most of our food was in Miss Micah's Item Box. There might be some stuff to eat in our packs, but I wouldn't know where... And if I went to find any, I'd have to leave the others. Going to a nearby town or forest would mean one of us would have to stay back, since we couldn't leave the sleeping group alone.

I heaved a big sigh, and Ele looked at me curiously.

«What is wrong?»

"I was just thinking of how useless I am..." I replied, telling him how I felt. He just looked even more curious.

«They were only able to defeat the monster due to the seed you created, were they not? Would that not count as being useful?»

"I made the seed, but I didn't actually *do* anything..."

«Then you can do something now.»

"Like what..."

As I thought over Ele's words, I suddenly remembered the Elixir Seed. Since it had healed Lord Royz's illness, it should be able to recover their mana.

I immediately spoke to the bracelet on my left wrist. "Please give me back the Elixir Seed I put in before."

A round orange seed with a little cork appeared. This was the Elixir Seed I'd made long ago in case it was ever needed. Now was probably a good time to use it.

«You will need to have them drink it slowly or else they'll cough it up,» Ele advised, and I nodded back.

I lifted Lord Glen's head up onto my lap and pulled the cork out of the Elixir Seed. Then, I poured just a little bit inside his mouth. It was only about a spoonful, but it was enough to wake him up.

"Lord Glen... Are you alright?"

He didn't respond, so I poured a bit more into his mouth and saw him swallow. His hand reached up to the seed, and he chugged it the moment it was in his grasp. Once he was finished, he looked a lot more lively than he had been before.

"This orange seed is the Elixir Seed you made for Royz back then, huh... We *really* need to keep its existence secret," he said with a strained smile, having experienced it for himself, finally.

"Um... I'm sorry for forcing you to drink it."

Even though it was to restore his mana, it probably didn't feel very good to have someone force you to drink something. I lowered my head, only for him to shake his.

“No, thank you for having me drink it. It was a big help.”

A wave of relief washed over me at his words.

“Should we have the others drink Elixir Seeds, too?” I asked, getting another head shake in reply.

“It would be okay if it was just Micah, but we need to hide it from the knights. Oh! Why don’t you try making a weaker version?”

«A wonderful idea,» Ele agreed, nodding.

“Then how about I make it taste the same, but only restore their mana by half? Should we add any other effects?”

“No, that’ll be fine,” Lord Glen shook his head again.

Taking a deep breath, I clutched my hands together before casting, “I’ll make a seed that restores the drinker’s mana by half — [Seed Creation].”

With a pop, a little round, green-colored seed with a cork appeared. It was about half the size of an Elixir Seed.

“So you can make seeds without a blueprint now?” Lord Glen asked, eyes widened in shock as he blinked.

“I’ve learned that a new blueprint is unnecessary if I’m making a seed based off of one I already know. I’ve verified it by using my Skill repeatedly over this half-year.”

“You’ve been working hard.”

“Yes,” I said, smiling, while he looked at me as if he was dazzled.

After that, he looked over to the green seed. “It’s called an Aopo Seed. Its effect is to restore the drinker’s mana by half. It withers when planted.”

Since I had used the Elixir Seed as a base and only changed the effect, it also kept the part where it would wither if it was planted.

After that, I made enough Aopo Seeds for everyone who was sleeping. While Lord Glen took care of the knights, I had Miss Micah drink it.

“Mmm... Mmm?” After drinking the entire thing, she woke up, rubbing her eyes.

“How do you feel, Miss Micah?”

“Nothing feels off~ But I taste something really yummy in my mouth. Why~?”

I explained everything that had happened after she fainted.

“It really is delicious~! You could take away all of the effects and sell it as a normal drink~!” she said, flipping the Aopo Seed upside down to get the remaining drops.

After waking up all of the guardian knights with the seeds, Lord Glen came back over to me.

“I used [Appraisal], and they’re all back to half mana...”

I was happy to know that I’d made the seed just as I wanted, but he gave me a bitter smile.

“I’m sorry, but we’re gonna have to hide the existence of this one, too...”

“Why?” I asked.

Miss Micah responded, eyes sparkling and tail wagging, “The mana potions on the market now only restore a set amount~ But your seeds bring everyone back up to half mana~ They’d be a steal for anyone with a big mana pool~”

“So, basically, anyone with a large mana pool would want them badly.”

“If you were ever kidnapped, they might just make you endlessly create Aopo Seeds~ We can’t have that happening~!” Miss Micah punched her fist out as if she was attacking someone.

I really didn’t want that to happen, so I swore to myself that I’d hide the existence of the Aopo Seeds, too.

“Your Highness, thank you for saving us,” the highest-ranked knight said, speaking for the group.

Lord Glen forced a smile onto his face at their thanks. “I was the one to get you to drink them, but Chelsea is the one who made them in the first place,” he told them, holding out an Aopo Seed.

We’d just talked about keeping them a secret, and you’re telling them all?! I looked between him and the knights. For some reason, he kept going on, explaining in detail.

“To think that her Skill is nothing less than miraculous...!” one of the knights cried, clasping their hands together and praying in my direction.

“Then please, allow us to thank Lady Chelsea again.”

“Thank you!” They all spoke up at once.

While I stood there flustered, not knowing what to do, Lord Glen laughed cheekily. “They’re all going to be your personal guards. One of the reasons I brought them was to introduce you.”

“I’m going to have personal guards?”

He nodded. “Personal guardian knights and maids come with becoming the King’s brother’s fiancée.”

Embarrassed by the mention of our engagement, I looked downwards. Since my hands had been placed together, I saw the engagement ring on my right hand. *Not only did I get a defensive ring, but guards...* I realized just how much I was treasured.

“I look forward to having you along,” I said to the knights with a bow, and they saluted back.

Afterword

Long time no see, this is Milli-gram.

Thank you very much for buying the second volume of *I'll Never Set Foot in That House Again!*

This time, the story is significantly different from the version I wrote for the novel website "Syousetsuka ni Narou"... Honestly, I worked really hard (wry smile). The first volume of the comic is being released at the same time as this, so please do check that out, too.

Now, I'm gonna get to the thanks here, but... I've only got one page for this afterword, so I'll make it short!

Thank you Yuki Kana-sensei for drawing Royz so handsomely, my editor Y-san, the sales people, proofreaders, designers, and everyone at the print shop. Thank you to my friends R-san and M-san, my mother, my cousins who apparently read it without telling me, and the beautician and eyelash extension lady who always cheered me up.

Finally, thanks to you for buying this book.

Really, thank you all so much! I hope good things happen to all of you!

Milli-gram

I'll Never Set Foot in That House Again!

2



Author Milli-gram
Illustrator Yuki Kana



Glenarnold

Younger Brother of the King of Chronowitz.

Chelsea

Agirl appointed to the position of Research Fellow.

Micah

A foxwoman chef.

Roy

Former Emperor of the Radrael Empire.

Inside the box was a ring
with a stone the same color
as Lord Glen's eyes.

“You’re precious to me.
Please, become my fiancée.”



Bonus Short Stories

How to Interact with a Little Sister

A few days after Chelsea left the capital...

Tris was taking care of the field full of seeds Chelsea'd created, as he always did. He pulled out any weeds, watered the growing plants, and updated the growth logs. Once he finished everything, he used the Teleportation Circle to return to the Royal Research Institute, only to find Marx, Chelsea's older brother, standing in front of his lab.

"Lord Tris... Would you happen to be free to have a little chat?" the knight asked, giving his division's trademark smile.

He's asked me something like this before, hasn't he? Despite thinking it, Tris didn't let the words come out of his mouth.

"What do you need?" he responded with a bright smile of his own, having already gotten all of his morning tasks done.

Marx's smile disappeared when he heard the researcher's response, morphing into a serious look. "Please, teach me how to interact with a younger sister."

"...Why are you asking *me*?" Tris tilted his head, confused.

"Back at the send-off party the other day, you advised me that I would be disliked if I didn't praise my little sister's efforts."

"Ah... When Miss Chelsea was trying to talk like a lady, right?"

At the party, Chelsea had been doing her best to talk as ladylike as possible, just like she'd only recently been taught. However, her brother Marx didn't give her a single compliment—instead, he'd acted disappointed, trying to get her to stop. At the time, Tris had given him a warning regarding this.

"I don't want Chelsea to hate me... That's why I need you to teach me how to deal with a little sister!"

"That is something you should suffer through yourself, learning from Miss Chelsea's responses..."

"But Chelsea is on the road now. I'd like to at least learn a bit before she returns," Marx pleaded, still deadly serious.

Sighing, Tris answered, "I'll do it if you think hearing about my sister'll help."

Marx's eyes sparkled as he nodded, so Tris reluctantly told him his tales of suffering.

The truth was that the researcher's younger sister was a very fastidious noble lady. If she wasn't given an accessory that was the

absolute cutting edge of fashion for her birthday, she'd get offended and outraged, and refuse to speak to him for a month. If he had even a single hair out of place, she'd tell him to stay away from her.

As Tris recounted his tribulations, he could see Marx's soul leaving his body.

"...Little sisters are really hard to deal with, huh?"

"That's just my little sister. Miss Chelsea is probably different."

"Ah, you're right..." Marx agreed. "Once she comes home, I'll have a proper talk with her..." After that, he walked off with his head hung low.

"Do your best," Tris replied, forcing a smile as he saw Marx off.

Is Chelsea Bad with Any Food?

At the home of Royz, former Emperor of the Radzuel Empire, Miss Micah, the foxwoman chef, had announced she'd make dinner, so I decided to help. Granted, the only parts I could really do were putting the vegetables she cut up into the pot, and stirring things...

"Oh, that's right. What foods do you like, Chelsea~?" Miss Micah asked as she taste-tested the soup.

"What...foods?" The first thing to come to mind was the flan I'd eaten during our mana pool growing tea parties back at the Royal Research Institute. It was softer than jelly, and definitely a food I loved, so I answered, "I like flan."

"Flan's pretty full of possibilities, huh~"

I looked up at her, confused.

She gave me a smile back and said, "You can make it a bit harder, or suuuuper soft—or put bread, fruits, and even chocolate in it~ It's also great with cream on top~!"

I didn't know that... I want to try those, too!

"I'll make them for you sometime, if we have the chance~"

"Thank you very much...!" The fact that I wanted to try them must have been written all over my face. When I thanked her, Miss Micah tapped her fist to her chest, grinning.

"Are there any foods you hate, then~?"

"There's not really anything I hate," I responded. After I'd come to the Institute, I'd eaten nothing but delicious food and sweets, so I couldn't even imagine anything I hated.

"You're such a good girl~! Lord Royz absolutely refuses to eat sweet carrots, the pineapples in sweet-and-sour pork, or oranges in anything pickled~!"

But the sweet carrots next to hamburg steak are so good... I thought. I've never eaten sweet-and-sour pork or pickled food, so I couldn't judge those, but at least I'd learned a bit about foods Lord Royz hated.

“Last question... Is there anything you don’t like eating~?”

“As in...food I don’t like?”

“Something you can make yourself eat, but that you don’t enjoy~”

Back when I lived at the barony, I was rarely ever fed, so I snuck around eating scraps. A lot of it was stuff that had been dropped on the floor, like nearly rotten fruit... Anything I could eat was a treat. *But there was something I could eat then, but didn’t like... It filled my belly, but it was so awful...*

“...Burnt bread is really bitter, so I don’t really like it. I can eat it, though.”

Miss Micah’s eyes widened in shock at my answer. “Why would you be eating burnt bread when you’re a noble lady~!?”

“Um...”

I ended up having to give her a summary of my life so far—like how I used to be a baron’s daughter that wasn’t fed, hadn’t had any real ladylike upbringing, and how I’d been adopted by Margrave Sargent. I was worried she’d get mad or upset like my grandparents if I went into detail, so I really just brushed the surface, but...she was in tears.

“I... I hope you get to eat lots of yummy food to make up for how much you’ve suffered~!” she whimpered, wiping the tears from her eyes. “I wish I could cook it all for you~!”

“That makes me happy... Thank you.”

After that, Miss Micah became my personal chef, always making me delicious food and sweets, but that’s a different story. *Now that I think of it, Lord Royz might have overheard our conversation.*

Dances with Salves

Chelsea, her adoptive older brother Felix, and her adoptive mother Ariel, who was acting as the instructor, all stood within a room in the Sargent manor.

“Brother, I’m so terribly sorry,” Chelsea apologized, keeping up her ladylike stance.

“It’s fine... Let’s keep going.” Felix rushed to slap a smile on his face, but there were still tears in the corners of his eyes.

Ariel watched over them from a distance. “If Felix is alright to keep going, then let’s continue. Now, try dancing the seventh pattern one more time.”

Chelsea and Felix faced each other again. Felix put one arm around her waist and lifted the other, while Chelsea rested one of her hands on his arm, and placed the other on his lifted palm. They looked each other in the eyes and nodded, slowly beginning to dance.

At dance parties in the Kingdom of Chronowize where they lived, dancers would choose one of over ten dance patterns on the fly to match the song they were dancing to. Chelsea had learned six patterns so far. Today, she was learning the seventh, but...

Unlike the first six, the seventh pattern had some intense moves mixed in, so she ended up accidentally stomping on Felix's feet.

"Oww!" Unable to take the pain, he crouched down to shield his foot with a cry. She'd done it more than ten times already, so his poor foot must have been quite swollen.

"B-Brother! Oh, I'm so sorry!"

Seeing as Felix was no longer able to stand, Ariel gave a forced smile. "Let's leave it at that for today," she said, calling a maid to take care of his foot.

Chelsea hadn't known, since she'd always been with Glen who had his [Cure] Skill, but that Skill was rare. Smaller wounds like this one were usually treated with medicine and had to heal naturally.

Once his foot was treated, Felix plastered another smile on his face before leaving the room. Chelsea felt awful seeing him limp out.

"You can rest until lunch, Chelsea."

"Yes, Mother," she responded, returning to her room.

When she got there and sat on her sofa, a sigh slipped from her lips. Ele in his kitten form must have realized something had happened, and hopped up onto her lap.

«Is something amiss?»

"You see..." Chelsea told him all about stepping on Felix's foot during dance practice, and how it would have to heal naturally with medication rather than being healed with [Cure].

«I see,» Ele replied, tilting his head slightly. «Why not create a seed with a salve that could heal his wounds?»

"That's true... If I did that, Brother's foot would heal instantly!" she nodded before casting her Skill. "I'll make a seed containing salve that can heal all wounds — [Seed Creation]"

With a pop, a disk-shaped seed about the size of Chelsea's fist, the same shape as the medicine the maid had applied to Felix's foot appeared. Popping the lid off, she found it was full of healing salve.

Holding the seed, she hurried to find Felix.

"Brother, would I be able to talk to you for a moment?" she called after knocking on his door. The maid inside let her in immediately.

"Sorry you have to see me like this." Seemingly unable to take the pain, he was laying on the sofa with bare feet.

"I have a request. Could I trouble you to test this healing salve?" Chelsea asked, looking at his swollen foot.

He agreed readily, and she handed the salve-filled seed to the maid to put on his wound. Moments later, the redness was all gone.

Felix looked on in shock, moving his ankle to check for any pain. “This is amazing... It doesn’t hurt at all anymore. Thank you.”

“Oh, no. It was my fault for stepping on your foot, after all,” she answered humbly, but her brother’s eyes were sparkling.

“You’re such a gentle, caring, and wonderful little sister, finding something this amazing for me!”

“Um...” Chelsea had no idea how to respond.

“I’m so thankful to have such an angelically adorable sister! ...But how did you get something like this?”

She had to think for a moment. Since he was family, it would have been fine to tell him it was a seed she’d created, but he would probably keep praising her if she told him. That would be a bit too embarrassing, so she held her pointer finger to her lips.

“It’s a secret,” she replied, giving him a ladylike smile, just as her adoptive mother had taught her.

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I'll Never Set Foot in That House Again! Volume 2
by Milli-gram

Translated by Emily Hemphill
Edited by Meiru

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